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### artland, Spring 2012

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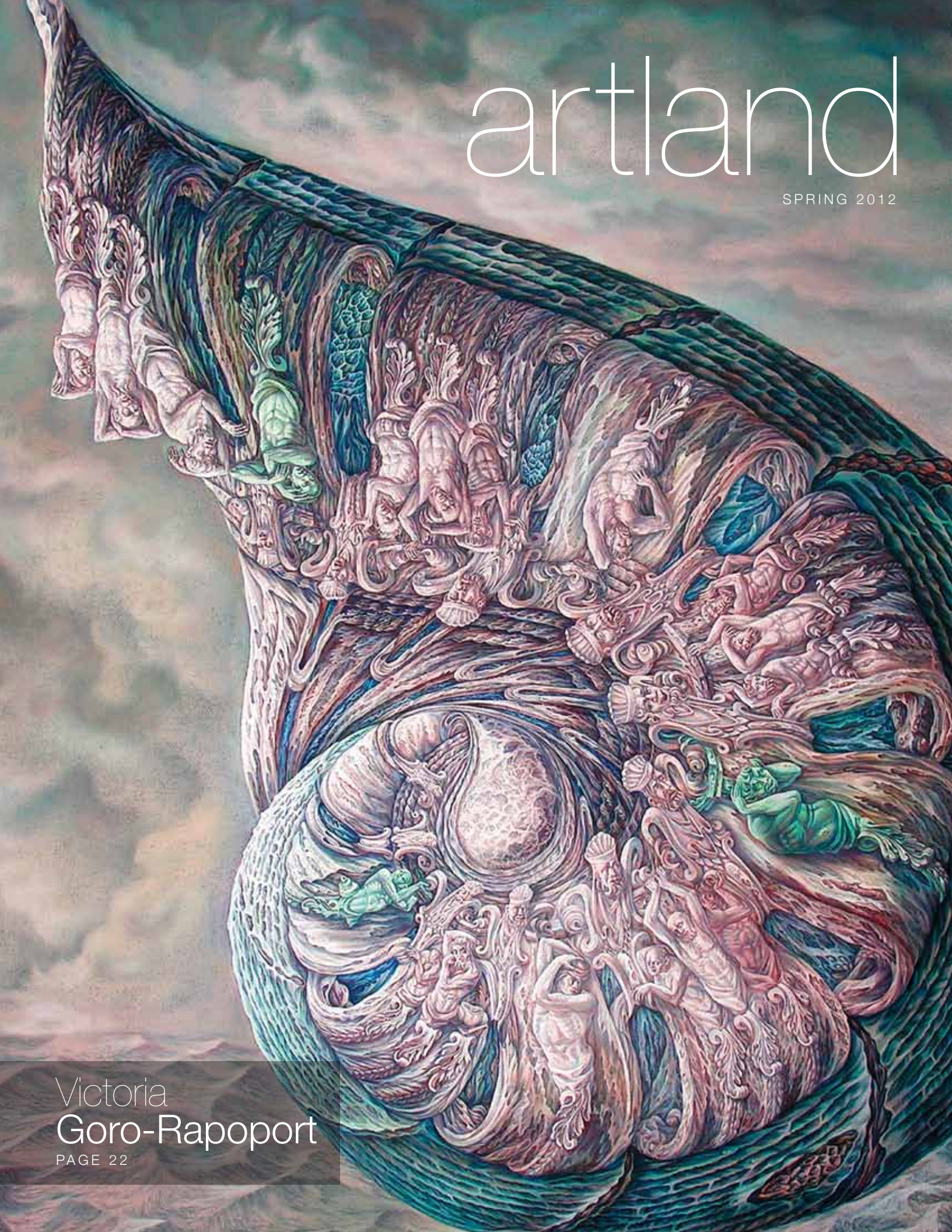
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# artland

SPRING 2012



Victoria  
Goro-Rapoport

PAGE 22





a space for: symposia; performance; creativity; ideas

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# artland

spring 2012

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Number One, Spring 2012.

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Woods  
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# Director's forum

Jorge Daniel Veneciano, Sheldon Museum of Art



Allow me to introduce *artland* in five perspectives.

## The Picture

Fly over Nebraska in the fall and you see quadrants laced with watercolor ribbons of green and brown, tracing the soft contours of farmland. The land itself becomes a work of art.

Nebraska is dotted with towns scattered across the flat and rolling prairies. Many are small—with big miles between them. Weaving them into the social fabric of Nebraska is a shared culture of integrity, hard work, and pride. Art is another big part of our state culture—always, at minimum, etched into the land itself. This is *artland*.

Nebraska is rich in literature, film, drama, television, music, performance and the visual arts. Like roads and rail lines, the magazine will link communities, and, in the process, create greater community among the arts in Nebraska. This is *artland*.

## The Purpose

*artland's* mission is to build and promote a community of artists and arts organizations in Nebraska by providing a print and online forum for dialogue and news. We want to capture the best of Nebraska in expected and unexpected ways, and we envision the magazine as a national model for statewide cooperation in arts advocacy.

## The Point

These pages celebrate people in the

arts; advocate for the relevance of the arts; provide a forum for voices from around the state; report on the art world of Nebraska; carry out the University of Nebraska's mission in teaching, service, and research—which we do with educational content, statewide service, and original interviews.

## The Plan

*artland* offers its pages to the people of Nebraska—to artists, arts organizations, and educators, who submit their stories and interviews about people, projects, and places across the state. We host exchanges of information and reflection, and thereby create conversations. To heighten the dialogue, we emphasize the interview format.

*artland* will be a semiannual print publication, released in the spring and fall. It will also feature an online complement (to be developed later) containing extended interviews and images not available in the print version.

## The Philosophy

Art sustains life. It's that simple.

Art promotes civility. It's that important.

Art invites problem-solving. It's that transferrable.

Art stirs the soul. It's that fundamental.

We understand the deep relevance art has in the life of individuals and societies. Art can live as easily on sidewalks as it can on gallery walls. Visit North Platte, for example, to see the colorfully tiled obelisks that brighten

its streets. To be shared, art needs to be articulated. That is why *artland* has come into being: to create a forum for sharing the arts.

## The Praise

I wish to thank the supportive and forward-thinking people at the Woods Charitable Fund, who believe in the power of the arts to better our communities, and who extended financial support to the realization of this magazine. We are especially grateful to the Ethel S. Abbott Charitable Foundation for its endowment grant in support of special programs at the Sheldon Museum of Art, of which this magazine is an important example.

I also wish to thank the original *artland* team: Greg Nosan and Sarah Baker-Hansen. Greg, who is also director of education and publications at the Sheldon, continues to elevate the editorial style and organizational capacity of *artland*; "Sarah-B," alas, has moved to the *Omaha World-Herald*, where her star is certain to shine brightly. Quentin Lueninghoener, the brilliant designer of *artland*, works at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln communications office, to which we are also grateful. I thank Pamela Thompson, whose considerable magazine experience helped us complete this inaugural issue. Ann Gradwohl and Eileen Boehmer, our newest team members, are bringing new energy and enthusiasm to the magazine; we welcome them aboard.

CIVIC MINDS

# Governor Dave Heineman

Interview by Jorge Daniel Veneciano

We thank Governor Dave Heineman for taking time to answer a few questions about the role of the arts in Nebraska.

**Jorge Daniel Veneciano:** In your travels around the country, what do you tell people about the arts in Nebraska?

**Governor Dave Heineman:** I let them know that Nebraska has a long tradition in the arts and that we are committed to promoting the arts and educating our citizens about the arts.

**JDV:** And you've made room for an art gallery in the Governor's Residence to prove your point! We'd like our readers to know a little bit about your own visual arts program at the Governor's Residence. Can you tell us what inspired you to pursue an art gallery there?

**DH:** Of course. We call it the Nebraska Governor's Residence Exhibition Program. It's sponsored by the Nebraska Arts Council and provides a venue for Nebraska artists to display their work. This allows every citizen and visitor the opportunity to acknowledge and appreciate the diversity of the visual artists in our state.

**JDV:** And in looking around the state, what would you say is one of Nebraska's well-kept secrets in the arts?

**DH:** You know, you don't have to live in Omaha or Lincoln to enjoy the arts—opportunities are available all across the state. The Sheldon Museum of Art has a traveling exhibition program, so does the Lied Center for Performing Arts, and there's also the Prairie Visions program. There are wonderful community theaters, community choirs, museums, and our colleges and universities offer plays and concerts on a regular basis.



Governor Dave Heinman pictured with *Cornhusker State All Star Club Band*, a 2011 painting by Ralston-based artist Frank Costanzo. The work, along with several of Costanzo's other canvases, was on display in March at the Governor's Residence in Lincoln.

**JDV:** So we should have no secrets in the arts. What would you say, then, is your vision for the future of the arts in Nebraska?

**DH:** Education is one of my top priorities and providing our students with the best education possible is essential to Nebraska's future. The arts are crucial to providing a comprehensive education to our students. Our state's educators are doing an excellent job of promoting the importance of arts education in our schools, colleges, and universities.

**JDV:** Nebraskans have greatly benefited by your support of education—we're all happy to note. Now, how can Nebraskans themselves best support the arts in our state?

**DH:** It's a three-pronged answer:

Attend: Concerts, plays, museums, First Friday walks.

Support: Private donations are vital for the survival of the arts.

Volunteer: Most of these organizations in our state are operated by volunteers.

**JDV:** We should hang a banner with that response on it! Finally, what are you particularly proud of in the state?

**DH:** I'm proud of the strong arts education in our schools. Our children are exposed to performing opportunities and arts appreciation courses as part of a well-rounded curriculum. That is often where the love of the arts begins.

**JDV:** So true. And love of the arts returns as love of civic institutions. Thank you for sharing with us your thoughts on this facet of civic life in Nebraska.

## WHO NAMED THE MAGAZINE?

We had an online competition to name the magazine. The winner is Kelley Heider, who was an MA student in the humanities at the University of Chicago working as an intern at the university's Smart Museum of Art when she ran across the announcement of the contest to name Sheldon's magazine. A native of Grand Island, who grew up in Omaha, Kelley was particularly drawn to the call for entries from the state she still considers home.

Kelley is currently Marketing Manager of the Journals Division of the University of Chicago Press. About her yearlong internship at the Smart Museum, Kelley says, "It reignited my passion for the arts, which will continue for the rest of my life. Even now, I'm looking for more ways to be involved locally. For me, interning at a museum was a completely fulfilling experience."



Splendid things.

## Sheldon Museum Store

12th and R Streets  
At the University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Tuesday–Saturday: 10:00–5:00  
Sunday: 1:00–4:00  
Closed Monday

ART PATRONS

# LeBarons Kathy & Marc

By Laura Reznicek



Marc and Kathy LeBaron

Kathy and Marc LeBaron don't just collect art: they integrate it into their daily lives, and more importantly, the lives of those they touch.

Kathy is the past president of the board of trustees for the Sheldon Art Association, the nonprofit support organization for the Sheldon Museum of Art. She and Marc have provided financial support for Sheldon exhibitions and programs, as well as those of the LUX Center for the Arts, the Museum of Nebraska Art, and other arts organizations. Marc is the chairman of the International Sculpture Center and serves as president-elect of the board of the Nebraska Cultural Endowment.

The couple would be the first to say that they were mentored by Karen and Robert Duncan, who are also major art collectors and supporters of the arts.

This common interest enticed them to build an artists' studio in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, where they invite artists for residencies. Kathy and Marc have in turn become mentors to others, helping to inspire a new generation of arts patrons. Their business, Lincoln Industries, is well known for a corporate culture that focuses on learning and development, workplace wellness, safety, communications, and recognition. Another way they inspire others is by exhibiting artwork in the offices and meeting spaces at Lincoln Industries.

Kathy and Marc LeBaron have made a difference in our state. They live with art, they commit their time to arts organizations in the community, and they use their resources and talents to plan for the future of the arts in Nebraska and beyond.

## GOVERNOR'S ARTS AWARDS 2012

The biennial Governor's Arts Awards recognize those who shape Nebraska's artistic landscape. The impact of the arts, and these honorees, is felt in the classroom, the economy, and the community—they drive Nebraska forward. We celebrate their achievements and recognize the power of the arts in improving Nebraska.

The following Nebraska individuals and organizations will receive awards in 2012.

**Thomas C. Woods III**  
**Partner in the Arts:**  
Kathy and Marc LeBaron  
and Joan Squires

**Emerging Leader:**  
Anne Trumble

**Excellence in Arts Education:**  
Connie Dillow  
and Donald D. Ruleaux

**Heritage Arts:**  
African Culture Connection

**Leonard Thiessen:**  
Catherine and Terry Ferguson

**Organizational Achievement:**  
Blue Barn Theatre and  
Friends of the Midwest  
Theater

**Outstanding Artist:**  
Jun Kaneko





**Michael Jones McKean: The Rainbow Project**  
*Certain Principles of Light and Shapes Between Forms*

SUMMER 2012

APRIL 27



**Leslie Shows** | April 27 – July 28  
**Alex Borovski + Lonnie Potter**  
April 27 – May 26  
**Opening Reception**  
Friday, April 27 | 6:00 – 9:00 p.m.  
**Kan Seidel** | June 22 – August 4

JUNE 8



**\$100 Art Sale Fundraiser**  
**UNDERGROUND**  
Friday, June 8 | 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.

SEPTEMBER 30



**Artist-in-Residence:**  
**Application Deadline**  
Time, space and financial support

Images (top then left to right): Michael Jones McKean, rainbow test, October 2011; Leslie Shows, detail of *Face R*, 2011; \$100 Art Sale Fundraiser; former artist-in-residence Elisabeth Higgins-O'Connor.

## Regional news



Nike Belianina, digital levitation photography; Belianina, from Toronto, Canada, conducted a three-week workshop at Kimmel Harding Nelson Center for the Arts in 2011.

### NEBRASKA CITY

The Kimmel Harding Nelson Center for the Arts in Nebraska City is proud to celebrate its tenth year of providing space and uninterrupted time to visual artists, writers, and composers from across the country and around the world. Since housing its first resident artist in February 2002, the center now awards nearly sixty residencies annually. Awards range in length from two to eight weeks and continue to include housing, studio space, and a weekly stipend for every artist accepted to the program.

Over the years, the center has built

a permanent collection of artworks, publications, and media donated by former artists-in-residence. The collection, totaling nearly three hundred pieces, can be enjoyed by visitors during normal business hours. This spring, the visual-art portion of the collection will be available for online viewing on the center's new website, [www.khncenterforthearts.org](http://www.khncenterforthearts.org).

Emerging and established artists interested in being part of the Kimmel Harding Nelson's creative legacy should apply online by March 1 or September 1

annually. Special consideration is given to artists with ties to Nebraska or those having recently completed graduate studies in their discipline.

The Kimmel Harding Nelson Center for the Arts is a program of the Richard P. Kimmel and Laurine Kimmel Foundation, Inc, a foundation that supports the arts, agriculture, and education in the state of Nebraska and Western Iowa. More information on the foundation can be found at [www.kimmelfoundation.org](http://www.kimmelfoundation.org).

— Jenni Brant

### OMAHA

The Bemis Center, which celebrated its thirtieth birthday in 2011, unveiled its biggest project to date during the yearlong celebration: a major renovation of its Old Market building at 12th and Leavenworth Streets and a major expansion of its renowned artist-in-residence program. The center's \$2.6 million project includes five new studios for visiting artists and

residents. In 2012 Bemis will renovate the 10,000-square-foot Okada Building across the street from the center. Bemis Director Mark Masuoka hopes to turn that space into a world-class studio for artists to create large-scale ceramic sculptures.

The renovations let Bemis expand its renowned artist-in-residence program from 24 spots to 36, and competition

for those spots will be stiff. More than 1,000 artists applied for a spot in the program in 2010, and Masuoka said he expects a big jump in applicants in 2012. The money for the renovation is a combination of funds from foundations, corporations, and individual donors. It includes funds for programming in the new space for the next four years.

— Sarah Baker-Hansen

### OMAHA

One of Omaha's biggest recent public art projects is expanding its scope. The large-scale installation *Stored Potential* covers the silos of a vacant grain elevator near the I-80 leading into downtown. Begun in 2010, the series of banners focuses on issues of agriculture, food, and land use. Because the project has been so popular with artists and residents, phase two, focused on transportation, will be installed in May of 2012.

The first part of *Stored Potential* transformed the elevator from eyesore to conversation piece, and the creators celebrated its unveiling with an afternoon



Stored Potential: Transport(ation), digital concept rendering by Emerging Terrain, Omaha, 2011.

dinner at the base of the site, which is located off Vinton Street near downtown. Phase two will continue the discussion, focusing on starting a dialogue about the relationship between the elevator, the citywide hiking trail it terminates, and

the 76,000 vehicles passing it each day on the cross-continental Interstate 80. A few of the new banners are viewable online at <http://www.emergingterrain.org/storedpotential/home/blog/>.

— Sarah Baker-Hansen



# Regional news



## NORTH PLATTE

From September 2007 to late 2011, Creativity Unlimited Arts Council undertook the Community Unity Tile Project, which used art to inspire conversation and creative expression within North Platte and surrounding areas. The end result was five towers that now beautify the city, starting at the I-80 entrance at Veterans Memorial and continuing to Centennial Park, the Courthouse Square, Memorial Park, and Cody Park.

The nine-foot-tall, obelisk-shaped towers are covered with square porcelain tiles, each hand painted with scenes of Big Red football, buildings, cowboys, Lincoln County, loved ones, Nebraska, North Platte, ranches, soldiers, schools, and other commemorative images. Each tower is

designed to be illuminated by motion-activated, solar-powered lights. The sculptures contain 2,000 tiles, which were created by over 2,100 individuals. The project required hundreds of bottles of glazes, many hours of firing in kilns, and countless hours from volunteers who managed the program and assisted young artists in making a community time capsule that will inspire future generations.

Sponsors of the initiative include the City of North Platte, Mid-Nebraska Community Foundation, North Platte/Lincoln County Convention and Visitors Bureau, North Platte Public Schools, Lincoln County Commissioners, Original Town Association, Platte River Mall, and Joseph Hewgley and Associates.

— Julie Jacobson

This tile-covered tower is one of five sponsored by the Creativity Unlimited Arts Council.

## SCOTTSBLUFF

Last summer the West Nebraska Art Center began opening its gallery at night for studio drawing sessions. The program, called Drawing for Insomniacs, was geared to a group of local artists who worked full-time jobs during the day and needed a creative outlet once their kids were fed and the dishes were done.

The open-studio sessions provided an unusual opportunity for adults who had a basic understanding of drawing techniques and wanted to sharpen their skills. No formal instruction was provided—instead, artists worked side-by-side during fun, friendly, no-pressure drawing sessions that featured human skeletons, live models, and still life.

Four 3-hour open-studio sessions are scheduled Tuesday nights this April (3, 10, 17, and 24 from 8:00 to 11:00 p.m.) Bring your own drawing materials. Cost for the four sessions is \$45 (\$35 for WNAC members). Register by phone at 308-632-2226. Walk-ins are also welcome.

— Mason Burbach

## FALLS CITY

The Stalder Gallery, located inside the Falls City Library and Arts Center, has hosted exhibitions by artists such as Alan Tubach, as well as the Sheldon Statewide exhibition for the past five years, and has shown over 600 works

of student art for the local General Federation of Women's Clubs Art Contest. The 2012 schedule includes Commemorations, this year's Sheldon Statewide exhibition (April 6–May 7), Two Kinds of Home: The Life and Works

of Myron Heise from the Museum of Nebraska Art (June 1–July 14), and Wartime Escape: Margaret and H.A. Rey's Journey From France from Exhibits USA (September 1–October 15).

— Christina Wertenberger



Opening May 3, 2012  
**CON OJOS PROPIOS  
WITH MY OWN EYES**  
BY **JESÚS SÁNCHEZ URIBE**

**LA HUELLA PSÍQUICA  
EN EL TIEMPO MUERTO 2**  
THE PSYCHIC IMPRINT OF DEAD TIME 2  
BY **AURELIANO SÁNCHEZ TEJEDA**



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BALLET FOLKLORICO MEXICANO



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**Saturday, April 28, 2012  
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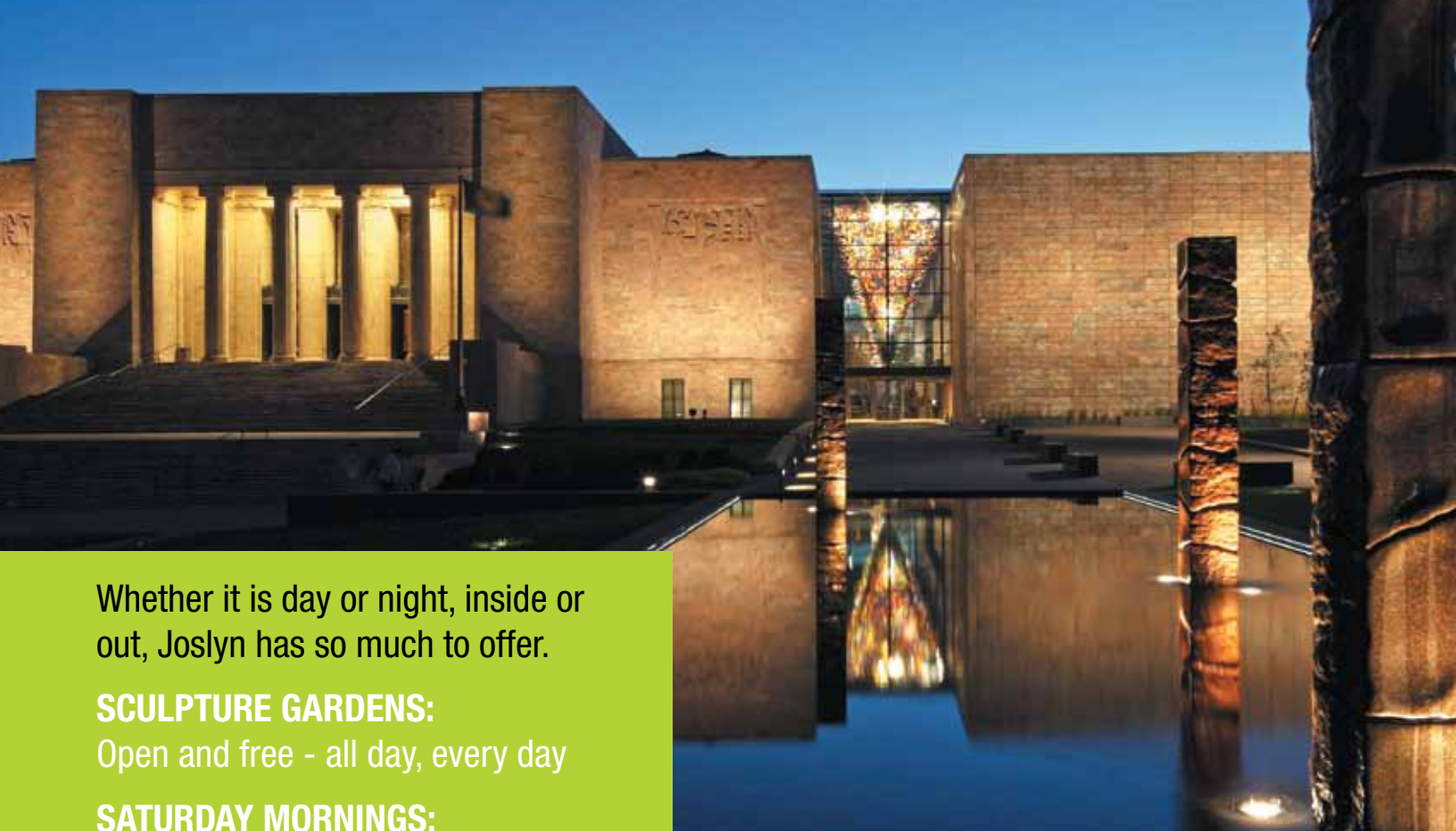
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**HOURS:** Tues., Wed., Fri., Sat., 10 am–4 pm; Thurs., 10 am–8 pm; Sun., noon–4 pm. Closed Mondays and major holidays.

#### TO LIVE FOREVER: EGYPTIAN TREASURES FROM THE BROOKLYN MUSEUM

Through June 3, 2012

*To Live Forever* explores the Egyptians' beliefs about life, death, and the afterlife; the process of mummification; the conduct of a funeral; and the different types of tombs. Rather than focusing solely on riches discovered in the tombs of rulers and nobles, the exhibition reveals for the first time how non-royals prepared for the afterlife. Featuring more than 100 objects, it answers questions at the core of our fascination with ancient Egypt.

#### THE GREAT WEST ILLUSTRATED: CELEBRATING 150 YEARS OF THE UNION PACIFIC RAILROAD

June 30–September 16, 2012

In 1868, the Union Pacific Railroad commissioned photographer Andrew J. Russell to document the construction of the transcontinental railroad between Omaha and Salt Lake City, published the following year as *The Great West Illustrated*. See prints from this remarkable album and other rare Russell photographs from this commission, many of which have never been published or exhibited.

#### CONTESTED TERRAIN: PAINTING THE MODERN LANDSCAPE

June 30–September 16, 2012

This exhibition includes work from the past decade by nationally recognized landscape painters, whose work addresses our imprint on the landscape. It complements a simultaneous exhibition of photographs by Andrew J. Russell and together they show the first wave of industrial expansion into the West and some of its unforeseen consequences.

#### UNDER PRESSURE: CONTEMPORARY PRINTS FROM THE COLLECTIONS OF JORDAN D. SCHNITZER AND HIS FAMILY FOUNDATION

October 6, 2012–January 6, 2013

Featuring 75 images by artists from Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg to Kara Walker and Mikalene Thomas, the exhibition surveys the major idioms of contemporary practice over the past four decades, from hard-edged abstraction to pop, conceptual art, and recent works addressing race, gender, and identity.

## People on the move



**Dana Fritz** has recently assumed responsibility for the photography program in the Department of Art and Art History at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, where she serves as Associate Professor. She received a BFA from Kansas City Art Institute and an MFA from Arizona State University. She has been awarded artist residencies at Villa Montalvo in Saratoga, CA; Chateau de Rochefort-en-Terre in Brittany, France; and Biosphere 2 in Oracle, AZ. Her work is held in collections including the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art; the Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago; New Mexico State University; Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art; and Bibliothèque Nationale de France.



Now serving as the director of Nebraskans for the Arts is **Marjorie Maas**, a former consultant for small businesses and arts organizations. Marjorie's career began in marketing for the building-opening team of the Mid-America Center in Council Bluffs, and she later worked as Public Relations and Promotions Manager for the Omaha Symphony. She recently completed her term as president of Nebraska Shakespeare's Community Board, serves on the steering committee for Omaha Young Arts Administrators, is a graduate of Leadership Omaha Class 32, and was recognized as one of the Ten Outstanding Young Omahans of 2010 by the Omaha Jaycees. She and her husband have two young children.



Since January 2011, **Chris Sommerich** has led the Nebraska Humanities Council as its Executive Director. Chris has worked for the council since 2004. He has both his bachelor's and master's degrees in political science from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. In addition to his work at the NHC, Chris has served as president and on the board of directors for the Nebraska Chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals. Prior to joining the NHC, Chris spent four years managing annual giving programs for Audubon Nebraska. For fifteen years, Chris has played his bass guitar on and off in local Lincoln and Omaha bands. He and his wife, Vicki, and their two sons, Eli and Benjamin, live together in Lincoln.



The Union for Contemporary Art has emerged as a new arts nonprofit thanks largely to Founding and Executive Director **Brigitte McQueen**. Brigitte has worked in advertising, as a pastry chef, and spent 10 years in publishing as a production manager with *Teen People* magazine. After adopting Omaha as her home in 2006, she opened a commercial gallery called Pulp and eventually became the manager of the Underground at the Bemis Art Center for Contemporary Art. Brigitte also serves as a member of the board of directors for the Kent Bellows Studio and Center for Visual Arts and is a member of the community engagement committee for the Joslyn Art Museum.

**Matthew Sontheimer** has joined the University of Nebraska–Lincoln's Department of Art and Art History as Assistant Professor of Painting and Drawing. Sontheimer's work is concerned with the networks of communication in our daily lives. The artist received a BFA from Stephen F. Austin State University and an MFA from Montana State University. His work is represented by the Talley Dunn Gallery, in Dallas and the Devin Borden Gallery in Houston, and can be found in the collections of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the New Orleans Museum of Art, and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.



**Heather Thomas** is the new Development Officer for the Nebraska Humanities Council, a nonprofit organization serving the state by promoting an understanding of our history and culture. Before joining the NHC, she was the Education Director for the Haydon Art Center. She is passionate about bringing art and the humanities to the community, especially to youth, through outreach programming. Heather has worked in fundraising in the arts, architecture, and historic preservation for the University of Virginia and the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. She serves on the board of the Sheldon Art Association and has served on the friends' board of Pioneers Park Nature Center.

**Bob Reeker** and **Lorinda Rice**, new co-presidents of the Nebraska Art Teachers Association, are both elementary visual art and integrated technology specialists for Lincoln Public Schools. Reeker has served on the National Art Education Association (NAEA) board as Elementary Division Director and currently serves as a trustee on the National Art Education Foundation board. Rice is the NAEA Elementary Division Western Region Representative and serves elementary art educators across the Plains; she is also a practicing artist who exhibits at the Burkholder Project in Lincoln.



ARTIST  
Binh  
Danh

Interview by Sharon Kennedy

**Sharon Kennedy:** You have talked about your desire to reconstruct histories that occurred before you were born but that profoundly affected you. Does your interest in history and in telling stories correlate with your decision to become a photographer?

**Binh Danh:** Absolutely—looking at photos has always been a way for me to learn about the past. A photograph depicts a past event. My family and I fled Viet Nam in 1975 because of the harsh postwar conditions. I recalled that my mother only brought a few photos with her, those of her parents. Growing up in the United States, Viet Nam, its history, and my connection to it was something that existed in my imagination. The only way for me to access it was through photos and visual documentation of the war. It was not until I visited my grandmother in Viet Nam for the first time, in my early twenties, that I received photos of my family and me in Viet Nam. Because I was only a baby then, those images are both real and fictional: I could only dream of those memories of my mother holding me in her arms.

**SK:** Can you explain how the title of the exhibition *Viet Nam, Nebraska* evolved?

**BD:** In 2003 I was invited to visit the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and share my work with the community. A student gave me a photo of his father constructing a koi pond in the shape of Viet Nam. The image depicts a man in his fifties standing knee-high in a hole, laying black plastic into the soft earth. The father is smiling at the camera, happy with his creation. Unfortunately,

I have lost this photograph, and only memories of it exist. This image says a lot for those who have memories of Viet Nam, a country that they yearn for and were forced out of due to war and political persecution.

Like most immigrants and refugees to the United States, those of the first generation want to preserve their ethnic heritage and traditions. Refugees who resettled in Lincoln carried their cultural tools with them, using them to remake the landscape into something familiar, like little Italy or Irish and Jewish neighborhoods in Brooklyn. The title *Viet Nam, Nebraska* is a way to invite discussion about what it means to be a Vietnamese American. Like the picture I just mentioned, it is about planting Viet Nam into the soil of an adopted land.

**SK:** In another setting, you remarked, “History is not something in the past but here and now. It is happening right now and everyone’s history is our history.” Can you talk more about this?

**BD:** My other pleasure in life is science. When I was a child, I learned that everything is made of atoms. The atoms that make up all of us were created in stars billions of years ago. A single atom carries within itself billions of years of history, not only those we learn about in textbooks, but also those in the future.

I believe we do share history. Someone else’s history might be foreign to us, but the atoms that had been involved in that history could exist in us today. And I don’t believe this is a stretch. To be human is to be empathic, to understand someone else stories, the good and the bad.

**SK:** Describe your experience working with the Vietnamese community in Lincoln.

**BD:** What I wanted to achieve in this project was to present a self-portrait of Lincoln’s Vietnamese community, which is multidimensional: it includes people of different generations and religions, both new arrivals and those who came in 1975. Because the community is quite small compared to those in California, I was able to navigate easily from one member to the next. Someone would know someone else and put me in touch with them, and someone else would mention a temple or church I needed to photograph.

The UNL students were the most receptive to the project. I felt that they see *Viet Nam, Nebraska* as a way to be represented, to be the bridge from one generation to the next. I believe most of these students were born here in the United States or arrived as children and therefore do not have a connection to Viet Nam. As young adults in this country, they are trying to develop an identity, and being part of this project was a way to be part of the American story. I see this work as a collaboration, and during the exhibition, I hope many people visit the installation and share stories from one generation to the next.

**SK:** In your research, you discovered the Solomon Butcher photographs of early Nebraska homesteaders. You have likened these settlers to many of the Vietnamese who left their homes to make a new life here. Describe this connection a bit more.

*Buddhist Community of Lincoln (Chua Linh Quang), 2011.*

Archival pigmented print; 40.6 x 50.8 cm (16 x 20 in).







**BD:** I think this is the quintessential story of America, a nation of immigrants, an opportunity to start again, to be new. In Butcher's photographs, I saw family units, homes, and the landscape, but moreover a sense of prosperity. I thought much about those images in relation to this project. The faces might change, but the dream is still the same: a place to call home. In some of my pictures, those that show families in front of their homes, I tried to copy the composition of Butcher's photographs. We took chairs outside, and I spread family members in front of the home. In other pictures, such as *Vietnamese Buddhist Temple of Lincoln, NE*, I tried to focus on the landscape and the other houses in the background, which exist in contrast with the temple. His images are one hundred years old and depict Nebraskans as they were then. A century from now, I hope the images in this exhibition survive, so that those in the future—the offspring of these families—can look back at our time and say that was American then.

**SK:** Although much of your artwork has been in response to the Vietnam War and its effects, more recently you have been making daguerreotypes of Yosemite National Park. Talk briefly how you are going about this? What led you to Yosemite and how are you developing the images? What is your ultimate goal with this body of work and what does it signify in respect to your artistic direction?

**BD:** In recent years I have turned my camera on the history and landscape of America. As a member of a racial minority, I think I examine history and see land in new ways. Ever since I was a child, I have always questioned how much of an American I am. Do other people see me as an American? So lately, back in California, I have been

making landscape daguerreotypes of Yosemite. I bought a van and made it into a mobile darkroom so I could process my daguerreotype plates in the field, just as the famous photographer Carleton Watkins made some of his works about 150 years ago.

As a kid, I had always wanted to visit and photograph Yosemite. My relationship to this park, like that of most Americans, was through photographs. After watching the Ken Burns documentary on the national parks, I learned that they were invented because they give us, as a nation of immigrants, a way to feel anchored and rooted on this continent. They are the meaning of home for many of us. By making photographs of Yosemite, I am witnessing what it means to be an American and seeing this land through my own eyes via the ground glass of my box camera. Since daguerreotypes are highly reflective, viewers see both themselves and Yosemite in the image, forming a connection to this land in all of its complexity.

**SK:** Since this is a Nebraska magazine, and since you have now made three trips to this state, do you have some observations you would care to share based on your experiences here.

**BD:** Nebraska is an amazing place, rich in its cultural diversity and history. As an observer, the flat landscape is quite fascinating; there is a sense that everything is on an equal playing field. There's no big mansion on the hill; everyone lives at the same altitude.

**SK:** Would you care to give any advice to budding photographers?

**BD:** I hate to be cliché, but I'd say follow your dream, follow what comes naturally, and be in the present moment. I have to echo Steve Jobs's Stanford commencement speech: "Remember that you are going to die. Stay hungry, stay foolish."



Lion dancers at Sheldon from the Asian Community and Cultural Center.

## SHELDON CELEBRATES WITH TET FESTIVAL

To celebrate the Vietnamese Lunar New Year, nearly 650 people filled the Sheldon Museum of Art for its first-ever Tet Festival. Held on January 27, the event was filled with art, dance, film, food, games, and music. The celebration sprang from a partnership among Sheldon, the Asian Community and Cultural Center, the Nebraska Arts Council and the Nebraska Cultural Endowment, the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, and US Bank.

The Linh Quang Temple Lion Dance Troupe, the Karen Children's Dance Group, and the Chinese Performance Group entertained the large crowd. Vietnamese music was played throughout the celebration. To cap off the evening, an 84-minute film, *The Journey of Vaa Nguyen*, was screened in the museum's Abbott Auditorium.

The featured speaker of the event was Dau Nguyen, president of the Vietnamese Community of Lincoln, and comments were also made by Sheldon director Jorge Daniel Veneciano and Richard Boucher, president of the board of the Asian Community and Cultural Center of Lincoln.

"It was the Sheldon Museum's good fortune and privilege to partner with the Asian Community and Cultural Center to host the Tet Festival at our site," said Sharon Kennedy, curator of civic and cultural engagement. "We have grown from the experience and are looking forward to Tet 2013."

Next year's Tet Festival will be held Feb. 22, 2013, at the Sheldon.

*Vivian Nguyen, Environmental Studies, UNL, Class of 2014, 2011.*  
Archival pigmented print.



COLLECTOR  
Phillip  
Schrager

Janet Farber interviewed by Michael Krainak

Michael Krainak spoke with Janet Farber, Director of the Phillip Schrager Collection of Contemporary Art in Omaha, about aspects of the collecting career of late businessman Phil Schrager (1937–2010). Founder and chairman of the Pacesetter Corporation and its later spin-off, AmeriFirst Home Improvement Finance, Schrager was widely regarded as a shrewd entrepreneur, philanthropist, and one of the finest, most dedicated art collectors in the Midwest. In 2006 he opened a 6,000-square-foot gallery space at his office building, devoting it to a portion of his collection. Accessible by appointment to arts and educational groups throughout the year, the gallery will host its sixth annual public open house on Sunday, May 6, from noon to 4:00pm at 4405 S. 96th Street in Omaha.

**Michael Krainak:** Considering the many things one can purchase or invest in, what motivated Phil to concentrate on art? Why the preoccupation? Was this a Schrager family tradition?

**Janet Farber:** Collecting art was not a family tradition nor was Phil an artist himself, though he would confess to having harbored aspirations to be an architect. It was something that he came to through his own path and certainly on his own terms. He did not begin buying with the intent to collect, but he eventually recognized that he was acquiring with a purpose and rigor

unlike his peers. As for the question of collecting art versus other hobbies or investments, it shares with them the ability to create an aggregation of your own distinct choosing, requiring a consensus of one. Art tends to hook more deeply, offering those intangible satisfactions that are visual, intellectual, even spiritual. Phil looked for art that was, as he put it, “beautiful, striking and imaginative” and that would, ideally, touch his soul. That’s a tall order for a stack of stock certificates to offer.

**MK:** That said, how did this process begin? What and who, perhaps, provided the inspiration and guidance?

**JF:** In recounting his years of collecting, Phil would always tell the story of his first significant art encounter when he was a college sophomore traveling with friends in Europe. They’d visited Amsterdam’s Rijksmuseum, home to Rembrandt’s masterpiece *The Nightwatch*. He described the experience as rapturous—it awakened a completely new awareness of art and, I believe, had an effect on the scale, physicality, and capacity for impact that became part of his own aesthetic, even down to a sensibility about color, light, and movement.

In the early years, he bought some art without a collector’s intent: a pair of two-for-\$25 paintings to decorate bare apartment walls, a few of pieces by area artists. But Phil was getting to New York on business fairly often and

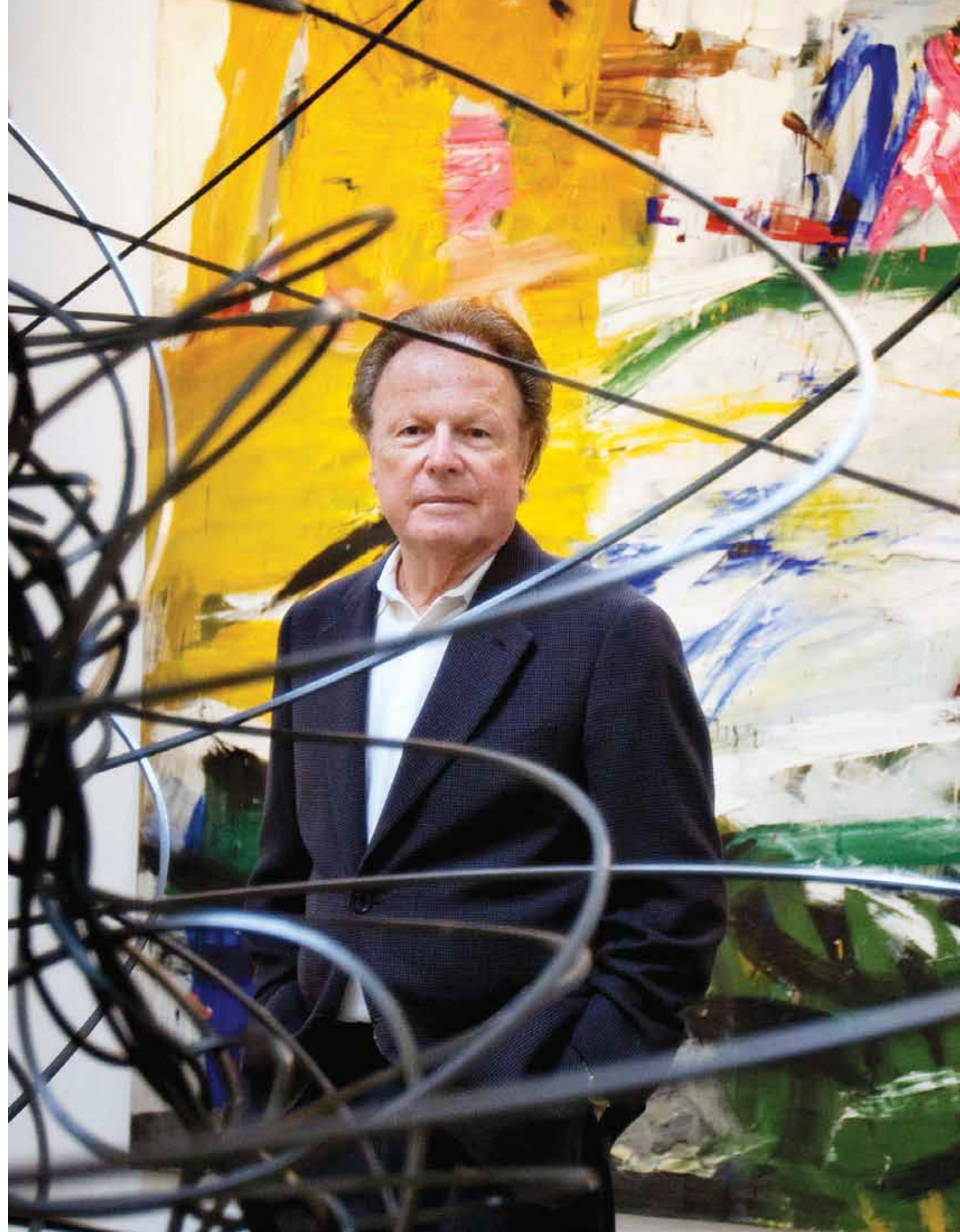
found himself flirting with a gorgeous red color-field painting by Mark Rothko that was also dramatically expensive: \$50,000 (about \$330,000 in today’s dollars). It did have the effect of sparking his interest in collecting and in the national art scene. In 1969 Phil purchased some editioned prints by well-known Pop artists, followed by a small 1950 Hans Hofmann oil.

By about 1973, Phil realized that he was interested in acquiring art seriously but knew that he couldn’t get inside that art scene from his desk in Omaha. So he made a series of calls that landed him at the doorstep of Klaus Kertess, then co-owner of Bykert Gallery in midtown Manhattan. Klaus introduced him to a number of artists, including Brice Marden, David Novros and Michael Goldberg, who became mainstays in the collection, and he helped guide Phil toward finding his own aesthetic and comfort zone. Klaus was Phil’s official art adviser for more than ten years and would be an unofficial sounding board for many more. Even in Phil’s final years of collecting, they’d compare notes on their “hit lists.”

As much as he loved it, Phil would be the first to tell you that collecting is hard work requiring constancy of purpose. Contemporary art, especially, never rests and shifts focus with lightning speed. He would never claim to be an expert, despite his daily diet

RIGHT | Phillip Schrager in 2008, looking through Antony Gormley’s *Feeling Material XXIII* (2005) in the foreground. Michael Goldberg’s *Park Avenue Facade* (1956–57) serves as a backdrop. Photo by Kent Sievers.

PAGE 18 - 19 | The galleries of the Phillip Schrager Collection of Contemporary Art in Omaha. From left to right are Thomas Ruff’s *jpeg nt101* (2004), Laura Owens’s *Untitled* (2003), Jim Dine’s *The Tender Boy* (2004), and Jonathan Lasker’s *What Babies Dream* (2004).











Schrager's art-filled office functions as a gallery in itself, featuring, from left to right, Jonathan Borofsky's *Walking Man* (1991–96), Nick Chiburis's *Untitled* (1970, on the desk), Mel Bochner's *Blah, Blah, Blah* (2009), Ken Price's *Dynamo B* (2002), Mary Heilmann's *Woody's Truck Stop* (1992–97), and Ralph Humphrey's *Hartcourt* (1965).

of art-related reading, phone calls and e-mails, despite his frequent visits to galleries, studios, auctions, and art fairs. Call it false modesty, but this was a steadfast belief.

**MK:** Overall, then, how would you characterize the Schrager collection in terms of numbers, size, medium and genre, and content?

**JF:** During his lifetime, Phil acquired nearly 500 recorded artworks, although the collection numbers closer to 350 today. His primary interest was in painting, with some attention given to sculpture; other media finished a distant third. One look will tell you that Phil was passionate about scale, gravitating toward canvases with the power to utterly engulf the viewer. The works he acquired range in date from about 1950 to 2009, and the majority were purchased within a year or two of their making. Twenty years ago, you

would have said the collection was New York School-centric, largely abstract, quite often painterly and physical, and characterized by artists who really addressed the formal aspects of their medium. Now, the collection's sweep is more international, less gestural and more linear, and often representational, with a distinctly pointed sense of humor.

**MK:** In terms of reputation, what are the truly outstanding works in this collection and why?

**JF:** There's no question that Phil acquired masterworks by artists now in the art canon: Brice Marden, Willem de Kooning, Mark Rothko, Richard Diebenkorn, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and Julian Schnabel were artists about whom he often spoke. And his are not minor examples—Phil had a knack for picking out the really good ones.

Besides the masterworks, one of the distinguishing features of his collection

is its emphasis on painting. You've got to remember that during the years he devoted to the medium, it was declared dead, then revived, and played out again. Sure, from a pure inventory-management perspective, it's easier to own paintings than, say, installations, but paintings were a matter of the heart for Phil. He supported painters when the market loved them and when it didn't. The results were pretty fantastic, in the end.

**MK:** From his own *POV* and personal taste, did Phil have particular favorites in his collection? What did he surround himself with in his office?

**JF:** Like being asked to choose among your children, it was difficult for Phil to have favorites. Clearly, he had favorite artists whose work he purchased often and over a period of time, including Goldberg, Marden, and Novros, and also Carroll Dunham, Bill Jensen,

Stephen Mueller, and Terry Winters. He offered Marden an unusual commission to design paint schemes for two of his corporate jets—they were cool and restrained, as you'd expect. In Goldberg he found not only an artist with a gift for extending the gestural promise of abstract expressionism, but also a dear friend. New purchases were often the favorite of the moment, but then you'd find him becoming re-entranced with paintings he'd stopped "seeing," as he did with Michael Tetherow's haunting *Face Painted Backward*. Phil's enjoyment could also be mixed with a degree of pride in the circumstance of an acquisition, whether he'd made a great deal, found just the right piece, aced out another collector at auction, or schmoozed an artist into letting go of a work they'd kept for the studio.

Phil's office looks like something in an *Architectural Digest* feature. Centered around a low, sleek desk and console, the room is outfitted with elegant modernist furnishings in leather, chrome, and granite, under which run cloud-soft taupe wool rugs. Dark wood beams and moldings frame linen-lined walls, and all of these elements provide a perfect, neutral canvas for the bold pop of the art collection. For his walls, Phil chose several works that were similarly classic and spare—Ralph Humphrey's frame painting *Hartcourt*, Robert Mangold's arching *Curved Plane/Figure VII*; even Richard Tuttle's *Overlap Composition VI*, with its glowing boxes of color on humble plywood, complements that soothing balance. If you sat around the meeting table, though, you were greeted by David Salle's curious and theatrical painting *Ashton*, a rather baroque homage to choreographer Sir Frederick Ashton. But the pièce de résistance was always the work that had the best, most confrontational sightline—hung over Phil's console, behind his desk. When the offices first opened, he installed a new work by Karen Davie, a loud fugue of swirling, colorful brushstrokes, guaranteed to keep his audience off balance. In 2009 he replaced it with a new Mel Bochner word painting, a distinctly conceptual piece for the collection. Although Phil never told me just what delighted him about this painting, *Blah, Blah, Blah*, with its pinwheel of repeated meaningless dialogue, seemed to me to have the effect of requiring the visitor to have something important and succinct to

say. Ironically, it was the last purchase he made.

**MK:** Why did Phil choose to hang this part of the collection in such a special place at work? What percentage of the collection is displayed in the workplace as opposed a residential location?

**JF:** When Phil created AmeriFirst in 2004, the company had to consolidate its operations into a light industrial warehouse with modular offices that weren't suited to displaying artwork. So he began to consider how else he might experience these treasures. Internationally, there has been a trend among private collectors and foundations to create formal spaces for their holdings, a project he'd begun to entertain. He first considered offsite spaces but rejected them when he realized that he'd give up that 24/7 enjoyment of the collection. So he carved out 6,000 square feet of underutilized space in his own building, built walls, hung track lights, and created a true art gallery.

The gallery and its nine rooms hold approximately 60 artworks; the executive offices another 40, representing something less than one third of the total collection. Art in the gallery is a combination of old favorites, "alumni" from Pacesetter's offices, and some pieces shifted from the Schrager house. Newly acquired works were almost always shipped to the gallery to see how well they "played together." Older artworks were also tested there to see if they could still hold their own in the context of others. In that sense, Phil viewed the gallery as an experimental space rather than as a specifically thematic or didactic one.

**MK:** In what way do you think his collection reflected Phil's personality and character? In what way is a collection part of the owner's persona?

**JF:** Well, you're asking me to play amateur psychologist here. Phil was definitely a Type A personality, a very big, high-energy personality, akin to the scale and physicality of the work that he preferred. He had an entrepreneurial spirit that was suited to the risks and rewards of collecting contemporary art. It was an adventure searching for "a certain kind of beauty," as he would say, and he responded to the thrill of the chase. A recent study suggests a connection between the personalities of artists and collectors—both very intuitive types, both open to new experiences. Art, especially the

uncertain terrain that contemporary art represents, is something that is not a one-and-done experience—it holds your attention, invites contemplation and repeat viewing, and does not always produce the same response every time. Phil enjoyed its rather insistent challenge and provocation.

**MK:** When you give a tour of or a talk about the collection, what are the most common questions and responses from your audience? What works do viewers most gravitate to and why?

**JF:** The most frequent response has to do with expectations of first-time visitors. They did not foresee an art gallery hiding in this industrial area, had no idea that the space would be so large or the collection so extensive. They are eager to know about Phil and how he collected. And where the rest of the collection is and what the house could possibly look like if some of these big works used to live there. And what the plans for the collection will be.

As for individual works, there are many favorites. Jim Dine's Pinocchio figure, *The Tender Boy*, seems to be our unofficial mascot, greeting everyone with joyful, open arms. Neo Rauch's *Blue Elephant* attracts visitors with its enticing, ambiguous surrealism; Alexander Ross's untitled green biomorphic painting with its obsessive coolness; Matthew Ritchie's *The First Sea* with its explosive, scrawling energy and Phil's inventive framing; and Rachel Lachowitz's eye-shadow mosaic, *John*, with the charm and audacity of its medium. Thomas Struth's *Audience 5* appeals for its pure reflection of our own experience of museum-going magic and for the hidden surprise in the photo. Really, there's something for everyone to love.

**MK:** If Phil were alive today, do you think he would still be collecting? How were his tastes and preferences in art beginning to change?

**JF:** I have absolutely no doubt that he would still be collecting. His taste was always changing to some degree, even if it did encompass a certain aesthetic. Among the last works he purchased was a very thickly painted, vibrant abstraction by the German artist André Butzer. He was really energized by it, thought that Butzer might be the "next best thing," and looked forward to following his career. In a way, the work, which is retro abstract expressionist, brought Phil's collecting interests full circle.



PORTFOLIO

# Victoria Goro-Rapoport

Text and interview by Rhonda Garelick

Contemplating a work by Russian-born artist Victoria Goro-Rapoport, one enters an alternate universe, or rather, multiple universes. Her etchings and digital prints—reaching over six feet in height—pull us into vast, dense, and intricately patterned spaces where finely wrought, highly stylized images seem to have floated in from a dream. These are images culled from disparate corners of our cultural memory, with particular emphasis on Renaissance iconography and Surrealist themes of play and metamorphosis. The result is a startling combination of gravitas and whimsy, Alice in Wonderland meets the Quattrocento.

Goro-Rapoport's landscapes mingle bodies, buildings, and the natural world, all realistically drawn yet wholly reimagined and transposed into new, peculiar, even mystical settings. Many of her works feature mysterious lines of text written in a private alphabet she invented for her own use, a secret code that begs for yet resists interpretation. Muscular, nude bodies recall Michelangelo's sculpted slaves or the biblical characters of his frescos in the Sistine Chapel. Half-standing buildings conjure a post-apocalyptic Manhattan or Roman ruins. Drawings of fantastical contraptions resemble the futuristic machines sketched by Leonardo da Vinci in his notebooks. Conventional scale and logic cede to a surrealist-inspired vertigo of proportions; inner and outer worlds collide, as do the organic and inorganic. In *Inner Above*, *Inner Below*, for example, the interior of a theater or opera house is dominated by a gigantic, androgynous human figure that dwarfs the surroundings, its lower body open to reveal the pelvic bones. In *Sleepwalker*, two building facades, which appear to be theatrical backdrops,

frame a mysterious tangle of cables criss-crossed over an expanse of cloudy, night sky, while a lone male figure—the sleepwalker—strides over one thin cable, as blankly calm as a character in a Magritte.

Goro-Rapoport is fascinated with magical spaces and the secrets that lie beneath surfaces, which is not surprising given her extensive training as a theatrical set designer. Her interest in exploring how bodies fit (or don't fit) into their surroundings might stem partly from her own experience as a Russian émigré forging her professional life in the new and very different space of the American Plains. She is also a deeply literary thinker, her conversation rich in references to authors like Dostoyevsky, Huxley, Nabokov, Orwell, and Poe. In discussing her work, the artist offers eloquent analyses of its political and personal meanings and the dense nexus of influences that inform it. We asked Goro-Rapoport, a professor of drawing and printmaking at the University of Nebraska–Kearney, to talk about her style, her background, and her technique. We then invited her to

comment on several specific pieces.

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**RG:** Tell me about your mysterious alphabet and the texts you create with it.

**VG-R:** My fascination with the invented alphabet started in my childhood. When I was about seven . . . I invented a foundation myth for myself: I came from the planet called Ilion (I may have read or heard about Homer's *Iliad* at the moment). The planet was destroyed, but some people, including many children, survived and escaped in high-tech space ships, one of which, full of children, crashed on planet Earth, but all the passengers survived, and dispersed among the local population. I imagined myself one of these aliens. I was smart enough never to mention this fantasy to my parents—they just would not understand. I did not really believe in it, but it was fun to play, as if it were true. My destroyed planet required history, so I invented stories about it, and, since this alien history could not be written in any of the Earth's languages, I invented a new alphabet for it.

Later, when I left Russia, I was often surrounded by languages I could not understand, which was both frustrating

*Shell*, 2006–07. Pastel; 92 x 61.5 cm (36 x 61.5 in). The piece shows a seashell combined with elements of baroque architecture. This combination turns it into an object that exists in both the realm of “god-made” and in the realm of man-made things. My great inspiration for these pieces was the nineteenth-century German naturalist and artist Ernst Haeckel, who created a series of stunning lithographs depicting marine creatures, emphasizing the symmetry and repetitive nature of their design in order to prove his evolutionary theories.







*Inner Above and  
Inner Below, 2004.*  
Etching and engraving.

and exciting. As an emigrant, I have lived for a long period of time in three countries that use four completely different alphabets: Russia uses Cyrillic; Europe and the United States use Latin; and Israel uses two different writing systems for Hebrew and Arabic. I had to learn and use these alphabets in order to fit into the societies in which I was residing. Since a lot of my work is inspired by literature, it is natural for me to use written texts in my prints. But here the dilemma arises: Russian is the only language in which I can confidently write grammatically correct sentences. But to use Russian while living in a completely different society could be interpreted as saying, “My roots are Russian; I don’t want to assimilate or mix with you, foreigners.” This was a statement I did not want to make. And so I invented a new, personal alphabet, incomprehensible to anyone but myself. This removes political undertones and places the viewer in the situation of the immigrant: confused and unable to read the world around them. This, in a sense, takes people out of their comfort zone, and mimics for them my personal experiences as an émigré.

**RG:** How would you describe your style and your range of influences?

**VG-R:** I am very much a nonpurist artist. My work combines very eclectic elements, a practice that I think stems from my immigrant experience. Hopping from country to country, from culture to culture, one is exposed to many political environments, climates, life styles, artistic approaches and techniques, and so on. To preserve one’s sanity and identity, one is compelled to select from this great pool of styles and ideas only the interesting or important elements and to reject or ignore the rest. The result is a hodgepodge of sometimes seemingly incompatible parts. In art, such piling up of movements and styles can often lead to incoherence and a failure to convey the message. Sometimes, though, it leads to something new and unique. One just has to experiment and find a way to bring all this diversity under one roof, so to speak.

In my early life, I was exposed mainly to the work of Soviet social realists. It was everywhere—in the streets (in murals and sculptures), in the underground train stations (in mosaics and stained glass), in the school buildings (in paintings and busts). I assume that the heroic, struggling, revolutionary figures made a strong impression on my young mind, since I am still drawn to them today. Of course, the Soviet realists had great

ancestors in the Italian Renaissance and Baroque periods, but as a child, I was exposed to social realism before I had ever discovered any other art movements. In my own work I use the human figure, often in an attitude of struggle or discomfort, and I see this influence coming directly from my early exposure to official Soviet art.

I was brought up in a thoroughly atheist society. Half of my family has Jewish ancestry, and half of my family is Russian. Religion was never mentioned at school, and it certainly was not on the agenda at home. I had regarded it as an old, moribund superstition. My interest in it was sparked when I started studying art history and realized that I constantly encountered terms I did not understand and stories I did not know. So I read the New and Old testaments and discovered that although I would never be a believer, much of the Bible is rather inspirational on an emotional and intellectual level. For an atheist, the Bible is the perfect place to visit big ideas about morality and justice, as well as cruelty, violence, and oppression. A believer might say that I regard biblical texts with the eyes of a modern infidel and bend their truth to fit my own limited, secular agenda. But that is the only way I can approach it—as an inspirational wealth of literary material. As a former set designer, I am strongly connected to literature as a source of themes and imagery for my work.

**RG:** How would you describe your technique?

**VG-R:** I usually use very minimal color in my prints, although very few of are totally black-and-white. I usually modify the black ink to give it a slightly warmer or cooler tint. In printmaking one can print a plate with many colors, but one would not be able to separate these colors with sharp boundaries. The transition from one color to the other will always be gradual, blurry. To create a sharp boundary between colors, or to mix and layer colors, one must introduce multiple plates, each of which carries its own distinct, sharply defined color. This process turns printmaking almost into painting. Some printmakers revel in layering and mixing colors, but for me this is not essential. The most important components of my images are lines. I create a linear image very much akin to a pen-and-ink drawing, and color is just something I use occasionally for emphasis. So most of my prints look fairly monochromatic.

I primarily use various intaglio

techniques: line etching, engraving, aquatint, mezzotint, dry point, and even photo-etching on occasion. Some printmakers are purists, but I really like mixing these diverse techniques, since they allow me an interesting combination of different effects on the same plate. Recently, I have started working with computer-generated colors and imagery. This hodgepodge of techniques is hard to coordinate and make coherent, but it looks rather interesting when done well.

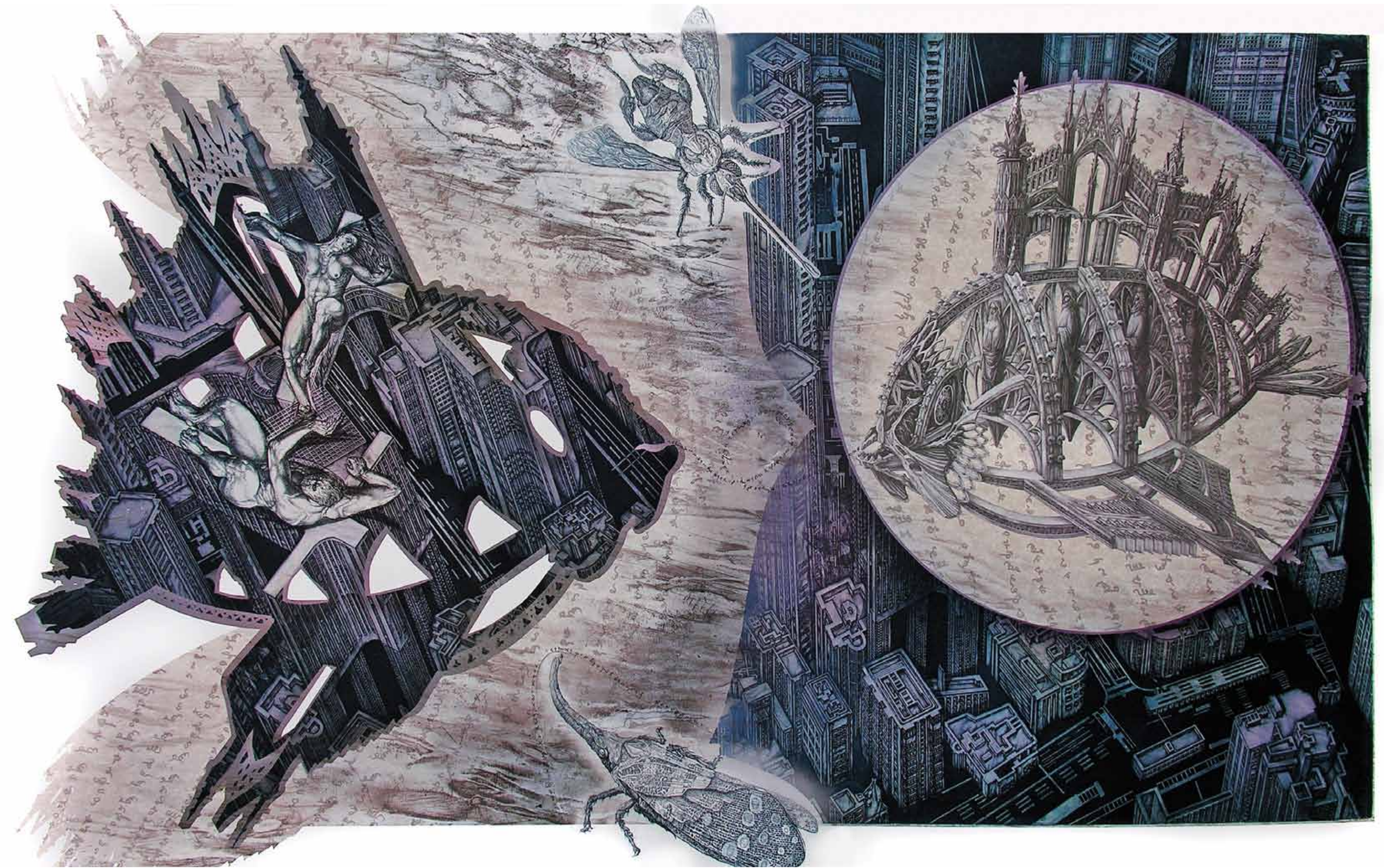
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Goro-Rapoport seeks nothing less than to investigate humanity’s greatest mysteries, “to penetrate the secret of [our] existence in this world,” as she puts it. The great contradictions evident in her work, the way it seems to pay homage to tradition and history while simultaneously exploding convention and restraint from within—often with ironic humor—all make sense when we consider her personal philosophy of the artist, which contains within it equal parts nihilistic despond and great optimism:

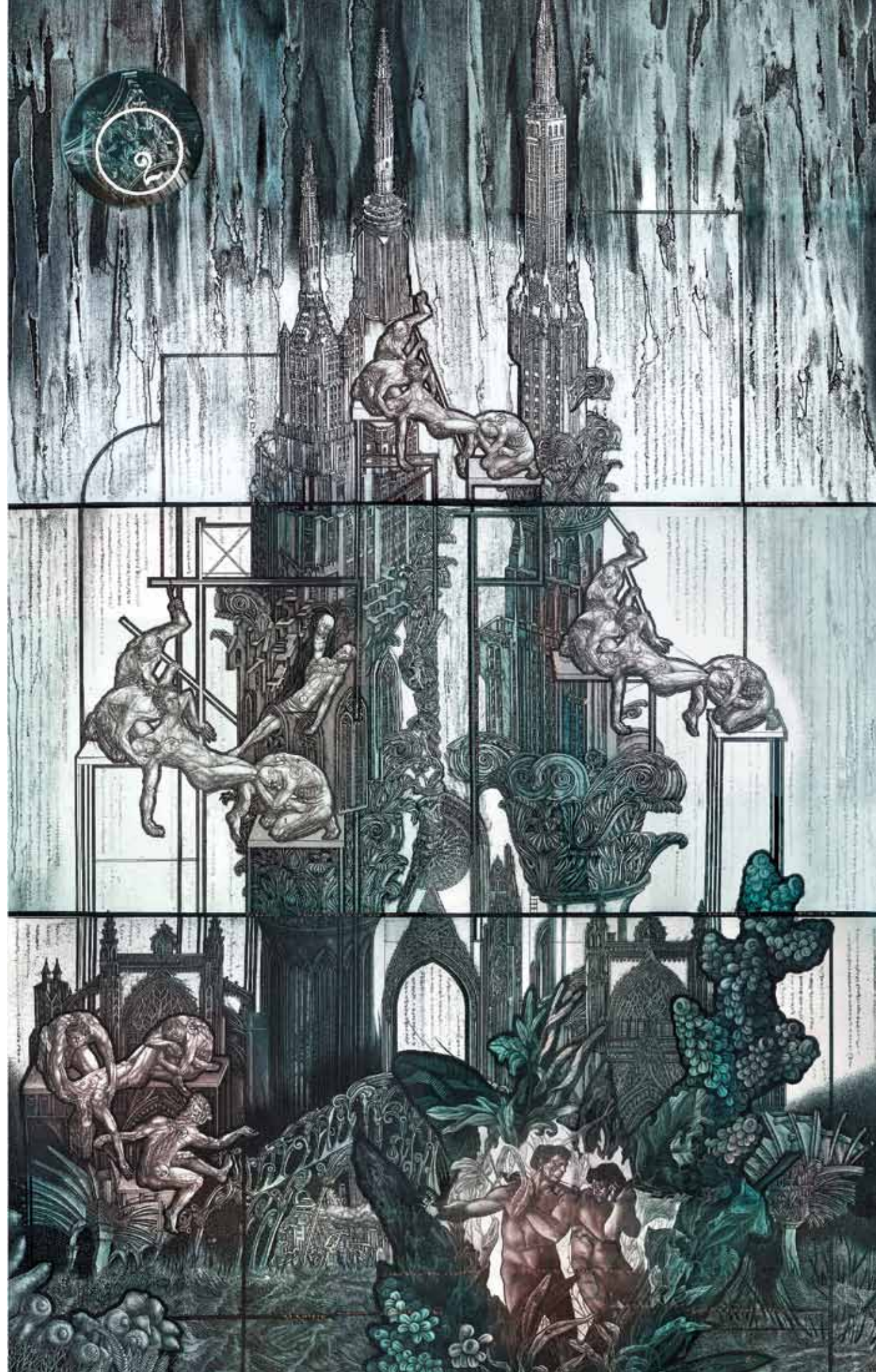
The fundamental question of who we are, why we are here, and the purpose (if any) of human presence in this universe, remains unanswered. How should we, as human beings, define ourselves in the world? What is the role of the artist in it? Do we function as a mirror, which reflects the reality of our time, or are we also a part of the apparatus, which propels it? Are we perhaps marionettes or puppeteers (slaves of religious and political ideas, or their masters)? Never before has humankind been so close to penetrating the mysteries of space, time and the workings of our own minds and bodies. At the same time however, we have never been closer to a catastrophic self-annihilation. And never before have the dividing gaps between instinct and reason, logic and passion, tradition and innovation been so deep and seemingly unbridgeable.

She sums it up, characteristically, with a literary reference: “The eighteenth-century Russian poet Gavrila Derjavin, in a moment of prophetic vision, managed to summarize several millennia of intellectual strife and struggle in two beginning lines of his poem: ‘I am Czar, I am God / I am Slave, I am Worm.’ I believe, that today, these lines are even more relevant than at the time they were written.”













LEFT | *Sleepwalker*, 2003. Etching.

Just like my invented alphabet, *Sleepwalker* is related to my emigrant experience. It depicts a figure suspended between two buildings that represent two worlds. The figure is walking the rope, which in itself suggests danger. There is also a sense of indecision, since the little figure is not moving anywhere at the moment—it just stands there, full of doubts, not knowing which world to go to for safety.

PAGE 26-27 | *Urban Crucifixion II*, 2009. Etching, engraving, and digital print.

I grew up in Moscow, a densely populated metropolis with a very vibrant, cosmopolitan social, cultural, and financial life. Rural Russia (or the United States) seems rather a quiet pond by comparison. The theme of this print is that the richness of experiences that a big city can provide can be very inspiring but also can also turn rather distracting and, for a creative person, even destructive. Constant effervescence, which is a main feature of all big cities, can lead to overstimulation.

PAGE 28 | *Stepping Out*, 2006. Etching, mezzotint, and engraving.

The old proverb says that a fool learns from his own mistakes while a smart man learns from someone else's. In reality humankind does not learn at all. If we did, we would have finished by now with wars, violence, inequality, and injustice. The bottom of the print features figures of Adam and Eve that I "borrowed" from Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel. They just have committed their first mistake and are now stepping out into a new, unknown, dangerous world in which making choices is a necessity and mistakes are inevitable.

PAGE 29 | *Mother Earth*, 2006. Etching, mezzotint, and digital print.

The symbolism of this piece is pretty transparent: I am revisiting the old belief that men exist for discovery and development, while women—being intellectually and physically inferior—should play a support role. The traditional role of women is represented by an image of an "earth mother": a procreator (rather than a creator) who births and supports future generations.



# CONSERVATION Kenneth Bé

Interview by Genevieve Ellerbee

**Genevieve Ellerbee:** How did you become a conservator?

**Kenneth Bé:** My interest in art conservation developed during my junior year at Yale University. As part of the art history seminar for majors, I learned about very basic concepts of conservation—especially how to pay attention to the condition of artworks. We had to write short condition reports on objects in the university art gallery, and that was enough to peak my interest. I also received good advice from a graduate student, who arranged for me to apprentice in the Yale Center for British Art's paper conservation lab. This hands-on experience was important in teaching me about the field, and it also gave me practical skills that helped when I applied for graduate training in conservation.

**GE:** Can you describe some of the training you went through in your studies?

**KB:** The conservation program I attended—which was at the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University—took four years and included a master's degree in art history. As it happens, the IFA is located in Manhattan, just blocks away from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Frick Collection. There was never a shortage of excellent material to look at! For the first two years, all the students trained together in lectures and formal courses that covered all materials and technology from prehistory through today, exploring how materials degrade and what approaches we can take in treating and preserving them. The IFA has a comprehensive collection of artworks for students to study and treat,

and I learned from that process and also from studying with painting conservators at the Met. After I decided to specialize on paintings, I spent the last two years of the program training at the Williamstown Art Conservation Center in Massachusetts. After that I went on to the Cleveland Museum of Art, where I worked until 2005.

**GE:** What part of your job do you find most fascinating?

**KB:** I'm always intrigued by how works survive through time: some maintain their pristine state over eons, while others are severely affected by the stresses of their short history. The other thing that astonishes me is how conservation interventions can correct or rectify some aspects of degradation. Cleaning oxidized varnish or excessive dirt is one obvious type of treatment, and it must be used judiciously, if at all. It's also gratifying to very subtly correct canvas deformations and reduce layers of varnish to reveal the delicate textures of original paint.

**GE:** Would you describe conservation as an art or a science?

**KB:** I suppose it is more a craft profession, actually—at least in the way it's practiced in regional conservation labs like the Gerald Ford Conservation Center in Omaha, where I work. Regional centers are designed to solve sometimes urgent issues of preservation and treatment. Many of the works that come to us are receiving their first-ever examinations and treatments. In a well-developed museum conservation department, there might be a scientist on staff whose sole responsibility is to make detailed technical analyses of artworks and to collaborate with

conservators and curators. When conservators decide how much to clean a painting or how to retouch missing areas, they must have a thorough understanding of the artists' intentions. Fusing these skills and disciplines of science and art is one of the unique characteristics of the conservation field, I guess.

**GE:** What services can people expect from a conservation lab like the Ford Center?

**KB:** Since we're primarily set up to solve practical problems for compromised artworks or historical artifacts, we can recommend treatments after a piece is signed into the center. After that, if the owner agrees to continue, we can perform treatments. Since we closely adhere to the guidelines and ethical procedures established by the American Institute of Conservation, we also document all of our work with before and after photographs.

**GE:** Is there a guiding philosophy that governs your work?

**KB:** I try to constantly remind myself that the look of an artwork is central to its meaning. However the piece is perceived in terms of its form, colors, textures, and so on ultimately influences what type of visual meaning we can gain from it. Art conservation can play a central role in helping (or hindering) these qualities. This is the great challenge in the profession: to do what is necessary to preserve—and perhaps restore—the visual integrity of an artwork with full respect to the artist's original intent.

**GE:** How is conservation important for works not within a museum collection?

**KB:** Museums have mandate to

conserve artworks as part of their overall mission to acquire, present, and preserve important objects. Works outside the realm of the museum, including privately owned artworks and those on the art market, all face the hardships of time and their environment. If an owner cares about an artwork, then any form of treatment to help preserve it is invaluable. Even good advice about display, storage, or transportation over the telephone can be significant. After all, nearly all works were not owned by a museum before they became museum objects!

ABOVE | Kenneth Bé in his laboratory at Omaha's Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center, which is a division of the Nebraska State Historical Society.

RIGHT | Kenneth Bé at work on John Falter's *View of Artist Sketching and His Own Lap* (1933), retouching passages of new paint that he had already applied to cover areas of loss.





AUTHORS

## Janis Londraville and Richard Londraville

Interview by Russel L. Erpelding and Audrey Kauders

Paul Swan (1883–1972) grew up in the small Nebraska town of Crab Orchard, far from where he wanted to be. Throughout his life, he was praised as a dancer and painter; after his death, however, his name faded into obscurity. Richard and Janis Londraville rediscovered Swan while doing research for another project. In 2006 the couple published *The Most Beautiful Man in the World: Paul Swan, from Wilde to Warhol* with the University of Nebraska Press.

Richard and Janis Londraville answered questions posed by the Museum of Nebraska Art's Russel L. Erpelding, ARTreach Coordinator, and Audrey S. Kauders, Director.

**Russel Erpelding/Audrey Kauders:** How did you learn of Paul Swan? What did you find most interesting about him?

**Richard Londraville/Janis Londraville:** Richard knew writer/model Jeanne Robert Foster during the last six years of her life. The former mistress of famed art collector John Quinn, she was also a writer for the American Review of Reviews. She met Paul in New York City around 1917, and they became close friends. She was a nonjudgmental person, kind, and interested in his views about art and life. She left Richard two photos of a bust that Paul made of her during that period, one of which is reproduced in our biography. There are a few pages about him in our 2001 biography of Jeanne, *Dear Yeats, Dear Pound, Dear Ford: Jeanne Robert Foster And Her Circle Of Friends* (Syracuse University Press, 2001). Because she admired Paul, we became

interested in him as well. Also, Janis's middle name—and her mother's maiden name—is Swan, although she and Paul are not related.

**RE/AK:** As you wrote in your book, Paul Swan was bisexual, which was not a secret. Do you think his works were influenced by his sexuality?

**RL/JL:** Occasionally Paul “left” a place quickly just when he seemed to establish a good reputation, and we wonder if this was because things were closing in on him a bit—perhaps there was suspicion about his behavior, or perhaps he simply needed to free himself of hangers-on. Leaving places where he was well known certainly hurt him, but he seemed to recover and begin again wherever he went. Finally, he seemed to find a home, a reputation, and a place of peace in Paris. But then the Nazis arrived, and he fled. He was never the same because he had to leave his partner, Fred Bates. It was a heartbreak from which he never really recovered.

**RE/AK:** Swan was celebrated as the “Most Beautiful Man in the World,” garnering prizes and praises over six decades. Why do you think he had been forgotten and was waiting to be “rediscovered?”

**RL/JL:** When Paul returned to New York City in the early 1940s, he was approaching sixty and had lost some of his good looks and agility. His art had gone out of style; he was largely forgotten or ignored. His dance and lecture performances drew a crowd of people seeking oddities and/or a return

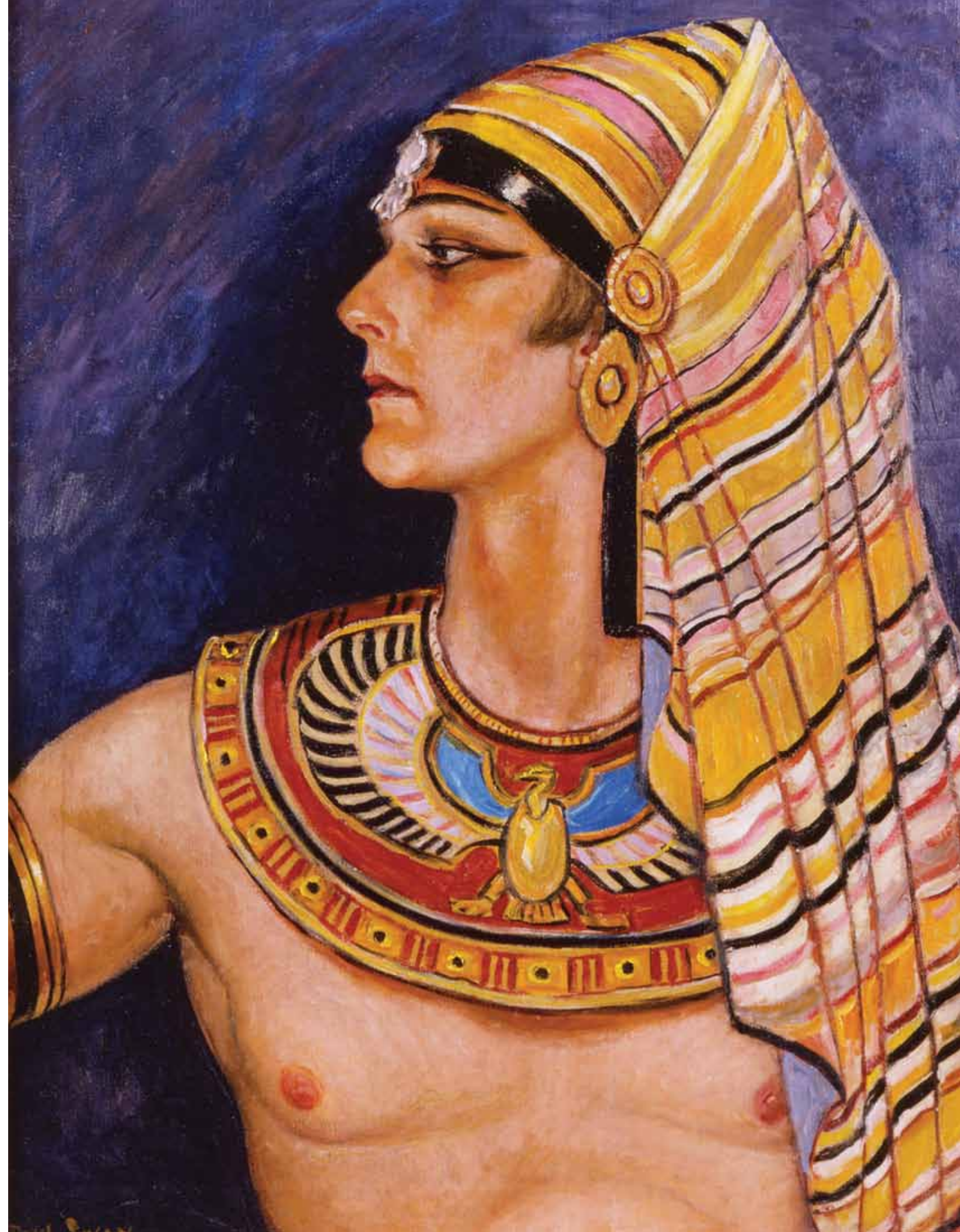
to an older, more traditional form of aesthetic beauty.

Andy Warhol liked to make art out of things others discarded, and this was essentially his interest in Swan. When the Warhol Film Project at the Whitney Museum of American Art came about, Andy's films of Paul—especially Paul Swan (1965)—were restored and brought again to the public. That helped. Also, Paul had been dead for a couple of decades, and views of bisexuality had changed. People were more open to learning about his eccentric personality, we think. And, most important, Dallas Swan, Jr., Paul's nephew, had kept his scrapbooks containing hundreds of articles in papers and magazines, which have not yet been indexed. These helped us, as researchers, become intimately familiar with Paul's professional life from its very beginning. Dallas also owned Paul's unpublished autobiography, which gave us access to the inner workings of Paul's personal life. Gay studies had become popular. The stars seemed aligned, finally.

**RE/AK:** Most artists draw from ideas that are most known to them, like a childhood home or family. Why do you think Swan completely turned away from his Nebraska roots?

**RL/JL:** Paul didn't turn away from his roots, actually. He had trouble with his family, and he didn't like farm work. He preferred indoor work with his mother. He was probably considered lazy by his brothers. But he always talked about being a farm boy. In many articles, he speaks of himself as just that. He

Paul Swan (American, 1883–1972). *Self-Portrait in Egyptian Dress*, 1923.  
Oil on canvas. Courtesy of the collection of The John and Mabel Ringling Museum of Art, the State Art Museum of Florida.





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PRESS CLIPPINGS

"Our eyes have had the great artistic pleasure in contemplating the pure and noble lines of the dancer, Paul Swan. His body has an elegance of proportions extraordinary, and the beautiful designs that he describes in space by means of movements well studied is a spectacle truly very beautiful."—Andre Foy, Paris Soir.

"A priest of rhythm."—J. de Saix, Le Petit Bleu, Paris.

"But one of the biggest hits of all the dancers here now was made by the American dancer Paul Swan, at La Potinière. The Paris press calls him the personification of grace, rhythm, and beauty." (Mr. Swan gave seventeen performances at La Potinière Theatre.)—Musical Courier, Paris Correspondent.

"The beauty of his movements, the grace and sincerity of his attitudes, the mobility of his face, make this dancer the most curious and captivating artist of our epoch."—Le Theatre et Comœdia Illustré.

"Paul Swan is a very great and very original artist, one of the most complete artists that we know. He possesses that sincerity which is the key to all of the imaginative arts. He possesses that science of pantomime which he uses with incomparable art."—A Quinzaine, Magazine, Paris.

Santiago, Chile, S. A.,  
 Diario Ilustrado, August 21, 1928:  
 "One of the qualities most overwhelming is the clarity of his intentions. He has great beauty of movement, is very defined and severe in rhythm and in the lines which form the dance."

"I want to thank you for bringing Paul Swan to the Summer School. His presentation of classic dancing was most artistic and was thoroughly appreciated by the largest audience we have had this summer."—Letter of James E. Lough, Director of the Summer School, New York University.

"There are few dancers after years of training who can acquire the marvelous poise, the balance, the remarkable relaxation which characterize the work of this young genius.

"Such superb physical reactions to mental impulses it has never been the good fortune of this writer to see before.

"Mr. Swan's every motion is so registered upon his expressive face, that one knows at once that the depth of feeling is born in his own soul. Nothing of that sort is ever taught."—Catherine Pannill Mead, The Milwaukee Sentinel.

"Within a day or so the young artist found himself in a dream of unimagined popularity. The Attic poets were singing his praises, the painters and sculptors made him a model for their works. The newspapers interviewed him and society flocked to his levees between four and five each afternoon. Few visitors to Greece have been received with more acclaim unless it be Lord Byron."—From The Athenian, Athens, Greece.

"Possesses grace, lightness and ability to impart eloquence. In his sense of rhythm the dancer was always exact. In breadth and certainty and in power, as well as in increased variety of pose. Mr. Swan showed his talents at their best yesterday."—New York Sun.

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Poster for a performance at Chicago's Goodman Theatre, c. 1920s, touting Swan as "America's First and Greatest Dancer." Courtesy of Janis and Richard Londravlle.

especially noted this to European reporters when he was in France. Many of his landscapes come from visions that began in Crab Orchard. He came home to visit on occasions, but there was conflict with his parents. He loved them and they loved him, but they were in different universes. His mother was a strong fundamentalist Methodist. His father was a hard-working farmer. He was a dancer and artist.

**RE/AK:** In your book, Swan's family seemed his greatest support as well as the cause of most of his disappointments. Did the Swan family realize and accept Paul's sexuality?

**RL/JL:** Yes and no. It was really a "don't ask, don't tell" situation with a number of family members. Several were disturbed by his eccentric appearance, his rumpled clothing, his flamboyant manner. But they loved the portraits of themselves he created. At some level, most of the family realized and accepted his lifestyle because he was living it far away from them. He asked for money from some, and that was difficult for them. It is certainly easier for more recent generations of Swans to accept Paul. We've done a lot of work on many artists and writers, and collaborating with all members of the Swan family has been the most pleasurable experience of our careers. It was a project filled with joy.

**RE/AK:** In your opinion, was Swan greater as a dancer or as a painter?

**RL/JL:** We believe that when he wanted to be so, he was a better painter. The quality of his work varied widely depending on whether he liked you, whether you had money to pay him well, whether he thought you had beauty—inner was just as important as outer to him. His oil portrait of Isadora Duncan, which recently sold in London for just under \$10,000, is superb. Some of his others, done for quick money, are not.

But for Paul, dancing was the most important. He painted often so that he could continue to dance. Dance is what made his heart beat and his soul sing. He was a talented musician as well. He did everything very well when he wanted to do so.

**RE/AK:** Swan was in some way always "in character." Do you feel he thought that the world was a stage that he lived his everyday life on and those that he met were his audience?

**RL/JL:** Yes, and Dallas Swan, Jr., who knew his uncle well, would say the same. Everyone who knew Paul said that even though his clothes



Paul Swan in Berlin, 1931. Courtesy of Janis and Richard Londravlle.

were second hand or second class, heads would turn when he walked into a restaurant or down a street in New York City. He had that presence. People would wonder, "What old movie star is that?" He was often mistaken for someone more famous. "I am Paul Swan," he would emphasize, if asked, as if they were stupid for not knowing.

**RE/AK:** Swan knew many famous people of his day. Can you tell us a bit about them and what they may have thought of him?

**RL/JL:** Paul's introduction to influential people would have been primarily through his profession as an artist. They would sit for him, make allowances for his eccentricities if he displayed them, and be happy with the resulting portrait or sculpture. He was inherently a kind man. We often say that he would have been a grand friend of ours, but that we would have been glad not to be related to him (so he wouldn't ask us for money). He had a gentle heart and was loved by many.

In some cases, he found kindred spirits like actress Nance O'Neill, who was bisexual and reportedly Lizzie Borden's lover at one point. Paul's portrait of her hangs in the Players Theater Club on Gramercy Street in New York, and we own another smaller portrait. Paul and Nance were probably able to discuss private issues that would have been dangerous to make public—their sexuality, for example. In public Swan would always talk about his wife and two daughters. After his wife, Helen,

died, he would often quote her to his studio guests, recalling, "As Mrs. Swan would say..."

**RE/AK:** Not surprisingly, Paul had an unusual marriage to Helen Gavit Swan. Can you explain how this affected his work and the relationship he had with her and their daughters?

**RL/JL:** Paul loved his daughters, but there was quite a bit of angst between them at different times. This isn't uncommon with an absent father. Much of the time, he was traveling and leading his own life in Paris with Fred Bates. They no doubt felt neglected. But there were great moments of love between them. Flora especially had issues to resolve, real or imagined, but before she died, she and her father made peace.

There was great love between Helen and Paul. She wanted children; he needed to be married for several reasons. It was dangerous to be bisexual. Dangerous. Illegal. He needed a mother figure, too, and Helen was that. She was older, and she comforted him. There was a sweet and great love between them—not often sexual, but deep and caring. It was certainly easier for them to live far apart so that each had the freedom to live their lives while continuing to love one another in their own way.

**RE/AK:** Why do you suppose we find Paul Swan of interest today? What was his most lasting contribution to the arts? Was he the "first" in any of his artistic endeavors?

**RL/JL:** Gay studies has become an important area of research in recent years. In Paul Swan, we have a man who moved through most of the twentieth century confronting his sexuality and accepting who he was with a kind of beauty and vigor that few could have done during that era.

His life was his most lasting contribution to the arts: he was moved by a vitality and passion for the arts and by a true love for aesthetic creation. Certainly he troubled his family for money, and he was wounded by people who did not appreciate his views, but he had a love of beauty that reminds us of Keats's line from "Ode on a Grecian Urn:" "Beauty is truth, truth beauty, that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

Paul was first in this spirit. He was better in all the arts than most, though not best; but he was very, very good; and he was best in understanding those two lines from John Keats.



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Image (detail): Augustus W. Dunbier, *Cabin Scene*, oil on board, n.d.,  
Museum Purchase, Museum of Nebraska Art Collection



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NEBRASKA CULTURAL ENDOWMENT



ART IN MOTION

# Charles Fairbanks

By Casey Logan



Charles Fairbanks has some identity issues. A filmmaker from Lexington, Nebraska, he’s as likely to be found in the Chiapas region of Mexico, where he is known as Charles Fairbanks, photographer, teacher, filmmaker, and this: El Gato Tuerto.

*Irma:* Fairbanks’ majestic tribute to living legend Irma Gonzalez, former world champion of women’s professional wrestling.

The One-Eyed Cat.

In the annals of Mexican professional wrestling—the high-flying realm of *lucha libre*—there have been some unlikely competitors, but perhaps none more so than a white thirty-something from Nebraska with a Stanford art degree and a voice so softly spoken that a strong breeze could lift it away. To this point, this is probably the defining characteristic of Fairbanks’ career. But that may be changing.

By spring 2012, Fairbanks is expected to receive a Guggenheim Fellowship, a midcareer award recognizing “exceptional creative ability in the arts.” In 2011 he completed a pretty impressive worldwide circuit for an

independent filmmaker, with five short documentaries to his name. Festivals in Brooklyn, Chicago, San Francisco, London, Paris, Berlin, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and Novi Sad, Serbia, have screened his work. Closer to home, for the second year in a row, he was selected for a showcase of midwestern filmmakers by the Omaha nonprofit cinema Film Streams (where I work). In November Fairbanks received retrospective treatment from New York’s Anthology Film Archives, which featured all of his films in a single 85-minute program titled “Tender Muscles.”

Four of the five films—“Wrestling with My Father,” “The Men,” “Flexing Muscles,” and “Irma”—deal quite directly

with wrestling. An argument could be made that the fifth, “Pioneers”—his most personal film and the one in which his Nebraska upbringing figures most prominently—does so indirectly. But what really unites his documentaries, despite all appearances, is not wrestling. What really interests Fairbanks lies behind the mask. “Identity,” he says, “and how it manifests itself in the way people perform themselves.”

How Fairbanks’s own identity as a filmmaker came to manifest itself in a luchadorean alter-ego called the One Eyed Cat goes something like this: In Lexington, he grew up the son of an artsy, new-agey mother and a salt-of-the-earth, tractor-salesman father,

inheriting traits from each. He was a sensitive, creative kid until the forces of puberty did their best to push such sensitivity into a corner. By the time he graduated high school, Fairbanks was a Nebraska state champion wrestler with an academic scholarship to Stanford, where he would go on to wrestle for two years before experiencing the first of two formative personal crises. In the course of one manic week he now likens to the severing of a thousand-mile umbilical cord, he quit the wrestling team and declared himself an art major. He registered to study in Mexico, cancelled an internship working on an Internet start-up “before it had even started,”

and signed on to live in a vegetarian co-op. Picked up a camera, started taking photographs, became a filmmaker.

This new path led him, a few years later, into an MFA program at the University of Michigan, where a funny thing happened. With a brain full of graduate school jargon and a particular lecturer’s rhetoric about the ills of masculinity conflicting with his own sense of the word, Fairbanks felt an old urge return. It wasn’t a reversal, exactly, more a reunion with a part of himself he’d come to ignore. “I was so much in my head in grad school, both in my art-making and in my academic classes, I think I felt I needed some balance,” he

says. “Wrestling was my way to start refining that balance. And also I had long had a desire to wrestle with a camera on my head.”

Fairbanks returned to Mexico, teaching photography to university students. On the side he began training with area wrestlers, first grappling in the highly technical sport of Brazilian jujitsu (documented in his claustrophobic three-minute short, “The Men”) and eventually breaking into the Mexican equivalent of the WWE. Two films have resulted from that experience: the 23-minute “Flexing Muscles,” a study of *lucha libre* that features Fairbanks wrestling as the One-Eyed Cat, and the magnificent 12-minute





*Flexing Muscles:* Fairbanks' 23-minute immersive look at the changing face of lucha libre, the masked world of Mexican professional wrestling.

"Irma," a portrait of Irma Gonzalez, former world champion of women's professional wrestling.

Both exhibit an approach Fairbanks calls "participatory observation," a cultural anthropologist's term that acknowledges—even requires—that the person doing the observing plays a role, however small, in what's being documented. That role is so obvious in "Flexing Muscles" that it comes with a mask and tights. In "Irma" it sneaks up. At first the film feels entirely observational, a camera following Gonzalez around as she goes about her day in Mexico City. For several minutes we witness what seems to be the impossible physical contradiction of a septuagenarian wrestler's life: struggling to make it up a flight of stairs one moment, lifting weights and flinging herself around on a mat the next. Suddenly, a simple but magical moment comes, when Fairbanks shows his hand. Standing proudly in a wrestling ring, Irma begins to sing. To us. As the camera pans out, we see she is flanked

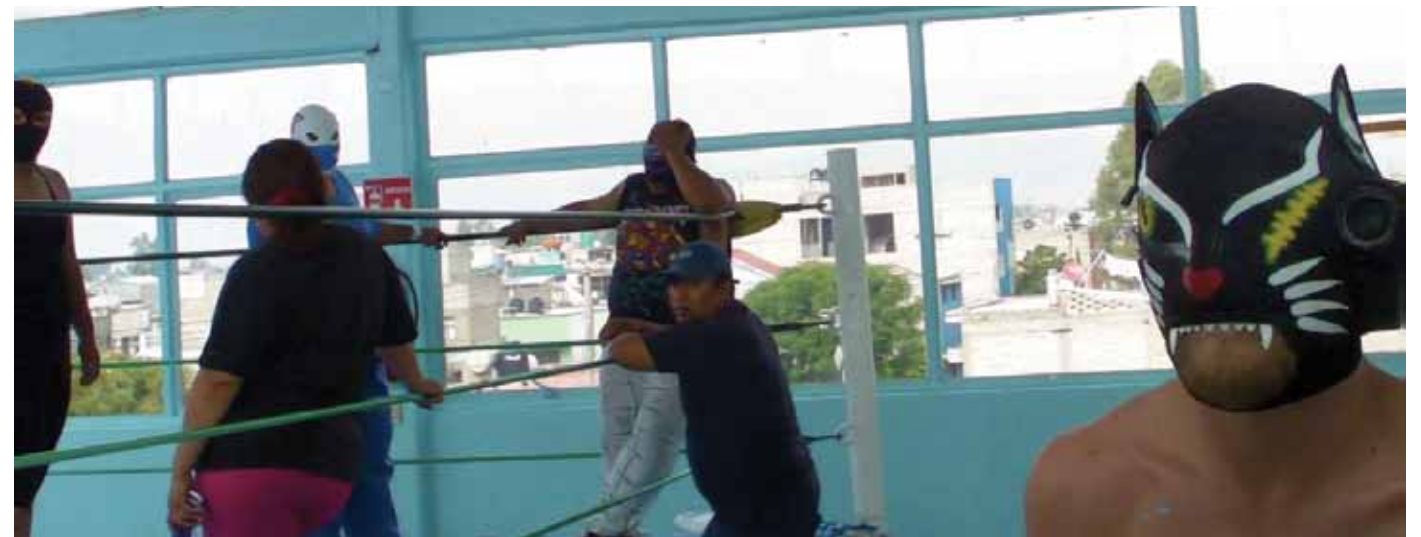
by two young girls, her granddaughters, performing a series of acrobatic poses. It's an album cover of a moment, a sweet, wry, nod-and-a-wink spotlight on a woman who in that instant seems like maybe the coolest person in the world.

If there is a bombast generally associated with professional wrestling, Fairbanks broadcasts the exact opposite demeanor. He speaks softly and thoughtfully, searching out the right word to answer a question about his work. He counts among his influences the French director Nicolas Philibert, the Japanese documentarian Hara Kuzuo, and the prolific Dutch filmmaker Johan van der Keuken. And then there is Werner Herzog, whose very first "Rogue Film School," which is really more a seminar on iconoclasm put on by perhaps its leading practitioner, Fairbanks attended in 2010. "I think there is a connection between being an athlete and being a filmmaker," Fairbanks says. "Werner Herzog was actually the person who in my life first articulated that connection. For him a lot of the great filmmakers

were also athletes."

Herzog, who pays little attention to the actual mechanics of filmmaking and instead prides himself on exploring less obvious subjects (lockpicking, reading Virgil, "being shot at unsuccessfully") would no doubt see an important connection between Fairbanks's Lexington roots and his filmmaking. A few summers ago, the artist returned to his hometown intent on making a film about his parents and the place of his upbringing. "It was such an emotionally charged process, and sometimes it was really difficult," he says. "It was hard for me at this point to even be in Nebraska. I felt like being in central Nebraska, I didn't make sense to me anymore. I didn't know who I was when I was in the process of making this film."

At 35 minutes, "Pioneers" is awkward and raw, at times beautiful and aggravating, sincere and angsty (particularly the scenes involving his mother and father, respectively). Altogether, it's a document of a young man coming to terms with where



*Flexing Muscles:* With a camera built into his mask, Fairbanks wrestles as the One-Eyed Cat in this telling, behind-the-scenes look at the business of Lucha Libre.

and who he comes from. It was edited in Belgium under the guidance of SoundImageCutlure, a sort of postgraduate film school dedicated to stretching the conventions of anthropological filmmaking. "When I showed the rushes to my colleagues in Belgium, I burst into tears as we were discussing this process," Fairbanks says. "They felt really strongly that there was a lot of good potential in the material, but it

was such a hard summer. It had built up and built up."

The residual effects of the experience are still there, he says, but today he enjoys coming home—seeing old friends, meeting new people, and taking in new experiences ("I just ate at the Somali restaurant in downtown Lexington"). But it's still complex. "For most purposes [I'm] based out of Lexington, Nebraska, but I think it would

be hard for me to live twelve months a year there. But I think it helps me get perspective. The landscape, the sky, the wind. I think in certain ways I know who I am, and I can listen to my mind really well there. So it seems like a good place to either plan new projects that are sometimes in other places and sometimes there, and also to think about experiences I've had teaching or filming in other parts of the world."

*Pioneers:* A meditative and self-revealing portrait of the artist by way of his parents and hometown of Lexington, Nebraska.





CURATOR  
Brandon  
Ruud

Interview by Pamela S. Thompson

Brandon Ruud is relatively new to the Sheldon Museum of Art. He has the intriguing title of Curator of Transnational American Art and has organized the museum's exhibition *Partners and Adversaries: The Art of Collaboration*, drawn largely from the museum's permanent collection. The exhibit explores the world of artistic partnerships through a variety of themes. An entire gallery, for instance, is devoted to Nebraska's Robert Henri and his important role in American art history as teacher and mentor. The exhibition also explores the complex relationships between artists and their models, as well as between artists and the federal government. One of the interesting aspects of *Partners and Adversaries*, however, was the equally collaborative nature of its community programming.

**Pamela Thompson:** How did the idea of staging community collaborations begin?

**Brandon Ruud:** The idea actually started in the summer of 2011 with the exhibition of works on paper from the Harriet and Harmon Kelley Collection, which focuses exclusively on works by African American artists. The Lincoln chapter of the NAACP and Nebraska Appleseed collaborated with Sheldon to create a gallery conversation that addressed the theme of art and social justice.

**PT:** How did the Nebraska Humanities Council get involved in this year's community conversation?

**BR:** Two active Sheldon Art Association members, Natalie Olson and Heather Thomas—both of whom are affiliated with the Nebraska Humanities Council—approached us about creating an event



Arts critic Michael Krainak and curator Janet Farber lead a community conversation about the pleasures and perils of collaboration in the Sheldon exhibition *Partners and Adversaries*.

that would engage community members in a dialogue that included the art and themes in this exhibit. Our guest facilitators included Shari Hofschire, director of UNO's Center for Innovation in Arts Education; Christopher Maly, educator and playwright; Janet Farber, director of the Phillip Schrager Collection of Contemporary Art in Omaha; and Michael Krainak, an art critic, writer, and educator. As it ended up, we staged three conversations in three different galleries that focused on the risks, rewards, and challenges of government sponsorship of the arts, public art education, and professional collaboration in the arts.

**PT:** Didn't the exhibition inspire other events as well?

**BKR:** Yes—the most significant of these was a series of one-act plays performed by the Angels Theatre Company. Angels,

led by Judith Hart and Becky Key Boesen, has a large and loyal following, and we've been lucky to partner with them during a number of recent exhibitions. In the case of *Partners and Adversaries*, the actors performed five one-acts in front of five different pieces of art in the galleries. Each performance hit capacity within minutes of ticket availability. The series was remarkable in that it included live music and dance as well as actors, directors and crew.

**PT:** So what actually happened in the galleries? It seems like you might run the risk, in a performance like this, of having many of Sheldon's most significant artworks temporarily become stage scenery or, at the very least, wallpaper.

**BR:** The works were actually critical to the pieces themselves, and I think that the audience was really respectful of the performance space as a museum



Edward Hopper. *Room in New York*, 1932. Oil on canvas.

gallery, too: they sat on campstools and followed instructions from Becky about where to move next, and our security guards stood at either end of the room. The first play, *Oogle*, was performed in front of Edward Hopper's painting *Room in New York* and involved two strangers who are attracted to each other at an art museum and strike up a relationship. The last, *Mouse*, was acted in front of Andy Warhol's *Myths: Mickey Mouse*. For me, seeing a live performance in our galleries was a wonderful experience, and I'm delighted that so many members of our community were able to take part.

**PT:** Is there a limit to the outreach opportunities that Sheldon is pursuing across Lincoln, southeast Nebraska, and even the state?

**BR:** Not really. We have a programming committee, civic engagement committee, and a vigorous education department, and we're fully aware of the need to reach out to groups not already served by the museum. Engaging new, diverse audiences—seeing new faces

inside our building—is a major priority.

**PT:** Can you give us an idea of the success this collaborative programming strategy has had in recent years?

**BR:** The Angels performances, the annual Día de los Muertos celebration in October, and our first-ever Tet Festival this February are all good examples of how we've connected to communities throughout the city. Together, we've explored different artistic media, reached out to new audiences, and offered fresh experiences to current ones. We're exploring the important role that an art museum like Sheldon can play as a center of community life.

**PT:** How do these types of collaborations make you rethink traditional lectures?

**BR:** The classroom is not for everyone. Attending a slide lecture in the auditorium may work for some, not others. We hope the variety of programs appeals to a broader variety of people.

**PT:** What has been the feedback from the series of events connected to *Partners and Adversaries*?

**BR:** We've received a lot of positive reviews and have made great connections with members of the community. I've also noticed a significant increase in the number of tours that I've been asked to give, which is always a good thing!

**PT:** What's been your personal take-away as the curator of the exhibit?

**BR:** To me, the most fun I've had in my year and a half at Sheldon has been to work with the museum's amazing collection. It's been so rewarding to be able to include some of the most important pieces in this show—our Hopper, a couple of Warhols, two major Henri paintings, and O'Keeffe's iconic *New York, Night*. I've also enjoyed showcasing the reach that Henri had as a teacher by exhibiting works by his many important students. I've had the great pleasure, too, of working with private collectors who have been gracious enough to lend their works to the exhibition. We have a very dedicated art community here, and I'm proud to be a part of it.





Henry W. Grady  
1925–2011

Henry W. Grady was a dear friend to the Sheldon Museum of Art. Until his death on November 16, 2011, Henry worked hard to promote the work of the Magic Realist painter Charles Rain (a native of Lincoln) and that of the iconic fashion designer Bonnie Cashin, both of whom were close personal friends.

Henry was born in Braintree, Massachusetts, and was a graduate of Thayer Academy and Harvard University. He served in the South Pacific in World War II. His close friend David Baum describes him best: “He was a truly unique man—kind, generous, with a brilliant mind and the courtly manner of a true gentleman.”

As an investment advisor in New York City, Henry Grady was involved in numerous charities, including the YWCA of the U.S.A., for which he served as president of the board for eighteen of his thirty-eight years as trustee. He was also a trustee of Parsons School of Design and Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, serving as its treasurer and vice president from 1968 to 1993. He served on other boards, including one for a Midtown New York residence for working women. As advisor to the Bonnie Cashin Fund, he always kept Sheldon in mind for funding gifts.

Henry established an endowment to fund the conservation and exhibition of Charles Rain’s paintings, which included naming a gallery at the museum after the artist and his sister, Charlotte Rain Koch. He also established the Charlotte Koch Foundation in his role as her executor, which made a significant gift in the 1980s toward an expansion of the Sheldon building. The Sheldon Museum of Art is now home to forty-six works of art by Charles Rain and remains the single largest collection of his works. Henry made frequent visits to Nebraska and played a role in encouraging the retrospective exhibition and catalog *Remembering Charles Rain: Selected Works from 1933 to 1973* in 2004.

His friendship will be dearly missed.



Charles Rain (American, 1911–1985). *Figs and Tuberose*, 1957. Oil on board.  
Gift of Henry W. Grady in memory of Mr. and Mrs. Henry R. Luce.

Richard Sands Hay  
1923–2012



Dick Hay was the photographic recorder of the active lives of the people and organizations of Lincoln, Nebraska. Dick and his camera were ubiquitous throughout our community.

He was a generous, thoughtful, active citizen of Lincoln, and he expressed himself through his significant and generous financial support of myriad arts organizations throughout the city.

Dick’s presence, his gentlemanly demeanor, his stories of his world travels, his kindness, and his generosity in so many aspects of our lives are missed.

Ron Hull



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© Brigitte Waldach, Fall 2, Diptych, 2009

# Contributors

**Genevieve Ellerbee** received her MA in Art History from The Pennsylvania State University and previously worked for the Daughters of the American Revolution Museum. She has been the Associate Registrar for the Sheldon Museum of Art for four years.

**Russel Erpelding** has been the ARTreach Coordinator for the Museum of Nebraska Art for one year. He has a BA in both Art History and History from the University of Nebraska at Kearney.

**Janet L. Farber** is Director of the Phillip Schrager Collection of Contemporary Art in Omaha and a former curator of modern and contemporary art at Joslyn Art Museum, where she coauthored several of the museum's collection catalogues. Farber has published numerous articles of art criticism and written on contemporary artists such as Gregory Barsamian, Jun Kaneko, and Karen Kunc.

**Rhonda Garelick** is the author of *Rising Star: Dandyism, Gender and Performance in the Fin de Siecle* (Princeton 1998), *Electric Salome: Loie Fuller's Performance of Modernism* (Princeton 2007) and the forthcoming *Antigone in Vogue: Coco Chanel and the Myths of Fashion* (Random House). Her work has also appeared in scholarly journals, museum catalogs, *Art Press*, *New York Newsday*, the *New York Times*, and the *International Herald Tribune*. She is a professor of English and Performing Arts at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

**Audrey Kauders** has served as Director of the Museum of Nebraska Art for ten years. Kauders was previously at the Joslyn Art Museum for 21 years, leaving as Deputy Director, and the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, Alabama, where she began her museum career in 1974. She studied at Adelphi University in Garden City, New York, earned a B.A. degree from Huntingdon College in Montgomery, Alabama, and an

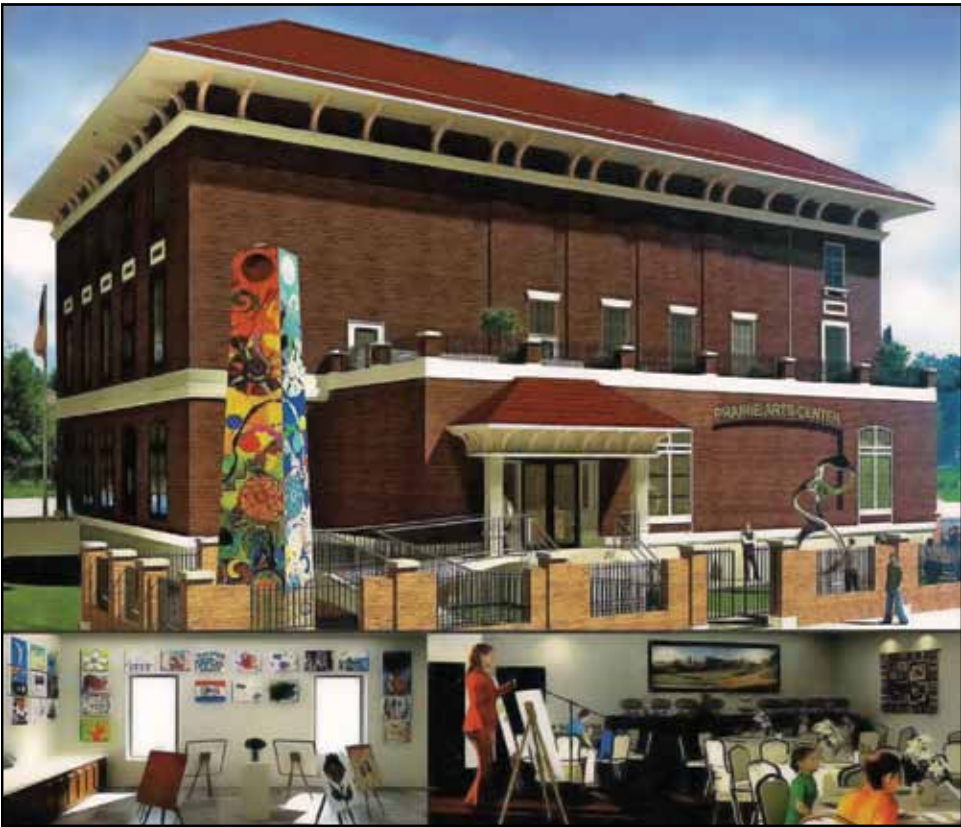
Executive M.B.A. from the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

**Sharon Kennedy** is Curator of Cultural and Civic Engagement at the Sheldon Museum of Art. She earned her MA in museum studies from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln with an emphasis in Art History. Kennedy had contributed essays to *Dan Christensen-Forty Years of Painting* (2009), *Play's the Thing: Reading the Art of Jun Kaneko* (2010) and most recently *Geometric Unconscious: A Century of Abstraction*. In 2003 she received the Museum Educator of the Year award from the Nebraska Art Teacher's Association.

**Mike Krainak** is the contributing arts editor and writer for the *Omaha Reader* and an adjunct professor in film studies at the University of Nebraska-Omaha, where he has taught part time for the past 30 years. As a freelance writer in art and film, Krainak has published in regional magazines such as Kansas City's *Review* and online for UNO's *Journal of Religion and Film*, for which he serves on the editorial board.

**Casey Logan** lives in Omaha, Nebraska. He is the communications coordinator for Film Streams, Omaha's nonprofit cinema dedicated to the presentation and discussion of film as an art form. He was formerly a staff writer for The Pitch newsweekly in Kansas City. His writing has also appeared in *Flak Magazine*, *Opium*, *The Reader*, and the *Omaha World-Herald*, among other publications.

A native of Lincoln, **Pamela S. Thompson** spent several years working in politics in Washington, D.C. before returning to Nebraska to be a reporter and editor at the Lincoln Journal Star. She was the founding editor of L Magazine and the managing editor of ONE Magazine. Pamela currently works at NET Television & Radio and is a frequent freelance writer, editor and theatre reviewer.



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our community and provides valuable support for Sheldon.

Recently, the museum has received a number of gifts in memory of those whose affection for the museum is still felt after their passing.

A dedicated docent for many years, Joyce Badami is remembered as an enthusiastic, gracious, and intelligent volunteer. A trustee of the Nebraska Art Association in the mid-1980s, she worked to develop new ways of attracting younger members to the group. Soon thereafter, Sheldon's summer concert series, Jazz in June, was launched. Joyce, who infused her surroundings with her love of art, was a strong advocate for art education.

Art was Kim Robert Cummings' passion throughout his life, and he created countless works in oil, pencil, and watercolor. An artist and storyteller, he was the lead sound technician at the Lied Center for Performing Arts upon its opening in 1990 and worked there for years.

Sharon Knapp is remembered as a special person who was beloved by her friends. A Sheldon docent and art-education advocate, she was connected to the museum for many years.

For more information on commemorative giving, contact Director of Development Laura Resnicek at 402-472-1366 or lreznicek2@unl.edu.





# THINK

William Copley (American, 1919–1996). *Untitled*, 1986. Silkscreen. Detail.  
Currently touring Nebraska with the 2011-12 Sheldon Statewide exhibition *Commemorations: Art from Sheldon's Permanent Collection*.

## Sheldon Statewide

The mission of the Sheldon Statewide exhibition is to serve communities throughout Nebraska by touring works from the permanent collection of the Sheldon Museum of Art. Since its inception in 1987, the program has reached over 275,000 people in 24 Nebraska communities.

For information or to schedule a Sheldon Statewide exhibition in your town, contact Sarah Feit, Assistant Curator of Education, at [sfeit2@unl.edu](mailto:sfeit2@unl.edu) or 402-472-4524.

## Art in Society: Nebraska

Art in Society: Nebraska provides 21st Century learning experiences for middle and high school students in the communities to which the Sheldon Statewide exhibition travels. Nebraska teaching artists create and conduct residency workshops that engage youth in activities that encourage critical thinking and creativity, foster dialogue and collaboration, and inspire civic participation.

Contact Kate Marx at [katemarxart@gmail.com](mailto:katemarxart@gmail.com) to learn how teachers and youth in your community can get involved in the Sheldon Museum of Art's statewide education program.

**SHELDON**  
MUSEUM OF ART  
SHELDON ART ASSOCIATION

  
NEBRASKA ARTS COUNCIL

  
NEBRASKA  
CULTURAL  
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